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THE
BELLE OF THE VILLAGE.

BY
JOHN MILLS,
AUTHOR OF "THE OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN," "OUR
COUNTY," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE BELLE OF THE VILLAGE.

CHAPTER I.

A FURTHER liberty will be taken with the pleasant little apothecary of Grundy's Green, and his stiff partner, Mrs. Doctor Grimes, by again drawing the notice of the public to them when within the conjugal sheets of the domestic "four-poster."

Mrs. Doctor Grimes was in bed, but as for sleeping, she entertained not the most distant inclination, and what more immediately concerned her spouse, her propension

of mind, if anything, was rather more in the perspective, that he should also be denied the soothing syrup of the drowsy god.

The apothecary, as usual, had made a long round of professional visits that day, and was weary with tinkering, puttying, and plastering the damaged systems of his multifarious patients; but he knew—perhaps by instinct, perhaps by the sharp cricket-like “ahem” of his stiff partner—that gentle sleep was as far from weighing his eyelids down as if the night bell had summoned him to lose as little time as possible in putting on his breeches.

For a short time, by way of a relish to the pleasure in pickle, Mrs. Doctor Grimes assumed the appearance of settling down and composing herself; but it was only one of those deceptive lulls which precede the storm.

"Ahem!" again made the apothecary's ears prick forward with their usual involuntary action.

The battery was on the point of opening, and a deeply-drawn sigh from the precincts of his breast signalized the fact.

"Are you going to sleep may I presume to ask, Sir?" said the stiff partner by his side, in a tone conveying that the pleasant little apothecary had committed, or was on the point of committing, an injury of the deepest kind.

"Not if my own dear chuck wishes a little bit of titty-wee, cozy-pozy chat," replied he, trying the conciliatory, but with a forlorn hope of success.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Mr. Grimes," sharply retorted his stiff partner. "Spare me that infliction at least."

The apothecary groaned inwardly in the spirit. The light business fell like a dab of

wet clay, and his resource appeared to rest only on the heavy line.

“Margaret,” said he, impressively, “why should I have to remind you of my professional reputation? Is not our bread dependent—”

“Oh yes!” interrupted she, “and our butter too. But I’ll thank you, Sir,” continued she, “not to address me in that disrespectful manner. I am perfectly conscious of the responsibility of what I say, and I’ll not be supposed wanting in that knowledge by any impertinent interference on your part. Things must have reached a pretty pass, I think, when a hop-o’-my-thumb like you can take upon yourself the majesty—if I may so express myself—of calling your wife to order. Upon my word it’s enough to make the bed clothes rise from off one!”

“Far be it from my wish, Margaret,” re-

joined the apothecary, "to be instrumental in any way, in maintaining a domestic difference—otherwise broil. I'll hold my tongue."

"*In-deed!*" exclaimed Mrs. Doctor Grimes. "Ho, you'll hold your tongue, will you, Sir? Then I'm not to be answered, I suppose. What a nice, polite man you are for a professional! What an ornament for a chimney-piece!"

"I am quite sure," returned he in a deep base, melodramatic tone, "I am quite sure, Margaret, you're going to greater lengths than intended."

"Permit *me*, Sir, to be the judge of my own lengths," added the sharer of his bed and board. "I'm not going to allow *you*, or anybody else, to measure *my* lengths."

"If this course is to be pursued," said the little humble apothecary, "if you will persist in this unnecessary and unhappy

difference, Margaret, may I ask what have I done?"

"You are always asking what you've done," replied Mrs. Doctor Grimes, "and if not nauseated with the question, it's because Nature has been bountiful in giving me an unusually strong stomach. Put any question but that, and it's possible we may come to terms."

There was a ray of hope.

"What then is your wish?" meekly asked the apothecary. "Tell me, Margaret," continued he, "and it shall be gratified."

"I've not a doubt of that," rejoined she, "not the least. There's no occasion to give yourself the trouble of making such assurances, Sir, for the future. The care which I intend to observe of having my wishes gratified, is on so comprehensive a scale, that assistance would be superfluous."

The apothecary was in a complete fix.

Turn which way he would, he was met at all points as if hemmed in by a *chevaux-de-frise*.

“Convey to me, then,” said he, “what your desires are, Margaret. They shall be unconditionally and unreservedly obeyed.”

“Ahem !”

Mrs. Doctor Grimes—like that isolated character spoken of in the remote ages, as the woman who loved to have her own way, but supposed to be as fabulous as the Griffin, Unicorn, and Sphinx—felt that her authority was approaching the absolute, and found herself endowed with new vitality upon the discovery of the power.

“As it would appear,” remarked she slowly, “that you begin to entertain a sense of what is due to me, Sir, I desire a faithful, true, and particular account of what your ears—provided they are long enough, and of which I should venture to say there

could be no doubt—of what your ears,” repeated she, “may have gathered in the shape of news, intelligence, or information, during your visitations of to-day, with a view of drawing my own inferences. You will understand—at least you will endeavour to do so—that I require no opinion or impression which the incidents may have caused in your own mind—admitting for argument’s sake that you possess a mind—but merely a simple narrative of the facts as they occurred. You understand me?”

“Perfectly, Margaret,” replied the apothecary; but he trembled for the performance of a task which he neither knew how to commence or finish.

“Very good,” rejoined Mrs. Doctor Grimes, “in that case I’m satisfied. Begin, Sir.”

It is easy enough to order the beginning of a story, but in case of there being none

to tell, the imposed duty is far from being an easy one.

The apothecary coughed both long and loud, but he could get no further.

“When you have quite recovered from that cough, let me know as early as convenient,” remarked Mrs. Doctor Grimes, in her severest tone.

The keenness of the edge, perhaps, took the apothecary’s breath away, for he said nothing in justification or excuse for his ill-timed cough.

“My dear Margaret,” at length gasped he, as his situation grew momentarily more desperate, “it will be more satisfactory that you should learn what you desire through the medium of questions. Whatever you ask shall be answered.”

“They may, certainly, lead more to the point,” observed Mrs. Doctor Grimes. “Well then, by way of commencement, what

passed between you and that pot companion of yours, Mr. Giles, this morning? I heard that he sent for you."

"His poor lodger, Mrs. Somerset, was taken worse," replied the meekest of apothecaries.

"Ha, poor lodger indeed!" ejaculated she, with a sneer. "Who she is, or what she is, or where she came from, nobody seems to know. I wonder, for my part, that she's not ashamed of herself in living under an unmarried man's roof all this time."

"She's a poor broken-down lady, Margaret," replied her husband, compassionately.

"I don't dispute that, Sir, do I?" quickly rejoined his stiff partner. "But broken down or not, there's a modest prudence to be observed, I suppose, in every female not totally lost to the dignity belonging to her

sex. However, we will pass that over and proceed. You say you found her worse?"

"Much worse," returned he.

"And taking the opportunity by the forelock, if I may so express myself," added Mrs. Doctor Grimes, "urged the necessity of confiding to you the particulars of her history, and so learned all about the mysterious lodgers at the general shop, eh?"

"She was too ill to speak, Margaret."

"In that case," resumed Mrs. Doctor Grimes, "we'll proceed to another subject without loss of time. You paid of course your three - an' - sixpenny visit to the Oaks?"

"I did," said the apothecary, and his brow crimsoned beneath his nightcap at the thought that three and sixpence was so easily earned.

“Did you gain any intelligence concerning matters in that quarter?”

“Oh yes!” exclaimed the apothecary, as if a circumstance had suddenly flitted in his memory, “I certainly—I most certainly did. You’ll be glad to hear some news, Margaret, I know you will.”

“You can keep these ebullitions to yourself, Sir,” gravely responded Mrs. Doctor Grimes. “And although I shall listen to what you have to communicate with some interest, yet I should have greater reason to be satisfied had the statement been a voluntary one. The necessity of pumping one’s husband ought not to exist. But go on, Sir, go on.”

The poor apothecary’s hopes of softening down the crudity of his stiff partner’s humour, were now abandoned to the winds. As the promise of news failed to rub off the knotty, rusty, and hacked edge of her spleen,

nothing would. The experience of the past taught him that.

“The Squire,” said he, like an automaton, and Mrs. Doctor Grimes listened attentively, “told me that he expected the tutor back to-morrow, and hoped my engagements were such as to admit of my dining with them at the hour of six.”

“The tutor back to-morrow, eh?” repeated she, as if each word merited careful weighing. “Did he say anything else?”

“Nothing in particular, Margaret,” replied the apothecary.

“Permit me, Sir, to judge whether the communication may be considered particular or not,” rejoined Mrs. Doctor Grimes. “Confine yourself to the simple facts.”

“He merely requested me to feel his pulse, and look at his tongue, Margaret,” returned the apothecary; “a not unusual method which we adopt with patients of

both high and low degree, and the examination led to the discovery of a slight tendency to an attack of laryngismus stridulus—”

“Oh bother that!” ejaculated his stiff partner. “Did he make any further family revelations?”

“No, Margaret,” responded the apothecary, “he did not.”

“Then go to sleep,” said Mrs. Doctor Grimes, and with this order she gave her spouse the broad of her back, and left him with a very shabby share of the blankets.

CHAPTER II.

THE linnets and the larks sang as gaily as ever in Paradise Lodge, but if there was not a sad heart among the feathered family, a heavy one might have been discovered beneath its roof, notwithstanding the sunshine without, and the music within.

The old Peninsular was not given to the weakness of tears; but one, at least, might now have been seen stealing slowly down his furrowed cheek, and, diverging from the direct channel, arrived by a circuitous route to the terminus of his nose, from which he

roughly brushed it with the end of his hook.

“Taking the year through,” said he in a mild kind of whistle, “I don’t cry a great deal. It may be a matter of forty year ago, or more, since I snivelled, but to be left alone again doesn’t seem to suit me.”

“Your friend, the corporal, must come and see you occasionally when we are gone,” remarked Mrs. Woodbee, “and opportunities will occur, I hope, of our meeting again.”

“Ah!” sighed the veteran, shaking his head, “there’s no knowing when folks part in this world that they’ll ever meet again. I’ve been at many a mess where those who dined together at noon didn’t live to meet at supper; and this is not exactly confined to us soldiers. But it’s no use a-grumbling,” continued he, with a wave of the hook. “What is must be, and what must be’s the best!”

"It would give me much regret," said Leonard, taking the old Peninsular by his solitary hand, "if I thought that I should never see you again. Your kindness has made me feel strong and well, and that I had not been for years—three long years."

"And if you don't remain so, young gentleman," replied Bill Stumpit, "or should they break their promise of treating ye like a Christian—and not a particularly tough one"—added he, "you know where to march, Sir. Paradise Lodge is the name o' the quarters, and once inside 'em, nothing short of artillery should force a breach."

"I shall always remember Paradise Lodge," rejoined Leonard, "as a refuge where a kind friend has a hearty welcome to receive me with."

"That's it, young gentleman," returned the old Peninsular; "that's the English of the text as sure as my father's great grand-

father's name was Stumpit. And if they think—I don't say who, but anybody—they could carry the defences, let 'em be told that I was at the siege of Cadiz, and consequently know something of fortifications. That's all," continued he, as if he had clenched the argument with a rivet. "Let 'em be told that I was at the siege of Cadiz," and the hook flourished in concord with the bit of British oak, as if the reminiscence stirred his martial spirit, and fired his blood.

"From the assurances, however, which we have received," observed Mrs. Woodbee, "I entertain but little dread of our meeting with all the consideration promised, and, therefore, believe that the fortifications," continued she, smiling, "will not be necessary."

"I hope so," said the veteran; "although if my feelings were to be thought of only, we should set about 'em at once, and make Paradise Lodge a citadel; for

there's something runs in my mind, that when folks have been particularly cruel, they don't know how to become the reverse in a hurry. But, as I said before, what is must be, and what must be's the best."

"But we are all liable to err," replied Mrs. Woodbee, "and if amendment be promised, it can only be carried into effect by the opportunity being given."

"That's true," rejoined the old Peninsular, "and there's no getting over truth. She'll show her face at last, although a plaguy long while about it sometimes. But there's one thing puzzles my brain sorely, and I can't get the better of it."

"What's that?" inquired Leonard.

The bit of British oak was raised, and then down it went upon the floor with forcible action.

"Dicky Crump," replied its proprietor, "brought ye here, placed ye under my par-

ticular care, told me to let no harm come, or overtake ye, and be on guard both night and day. Now, although a non-commissioned officer, he's my *sooperior* you'll recollect, and may bring me to a kind of private court martial for disobeying orders."

"In what way have you failed to observe the duties imposed upon you?" asked Mrs. Woodbee.

"I don't think it can be said that I *have* disobeyed 'em," rejoined the old Peninsular, "but what I'm going to do is a different matter."

"How so?" returned Leonard.

"Why ain't I going to surrender ye into the very hands of the *enemy*?" said Bill Stumpit. "Don't you beat a retreat, as it were, right upon his bayonets, trusting to his humanity to give quarter and ground arms?"

"My mother thinks—"



“Ay, young gentleman,” interrupted the veteran with an emphatic flourish of the bit of British oak, “but what will Dicky Crump say? A man of my acquaintance was flogged once for thinking right when his orders were wrong; but he caught it on the grounds that he had no business to think at all.”

“Our good friend the corporal,” said Mrs. Woodbee, “is too polite to oppose our plans, of which, by this time, he is acquainted.”

“To be sure, that’s correct enough,” replied the old Peninsular, “and in a land of liberty like this, people, to get anything in the shape of a return for the money it cost to make it one, ought to be allowed to do as they please. But a trust *is* a trust, and I’m far from certain that I’m not about committing a breach in mine.”

“You shall be held harmless for giving up possession of us,” rejoined Mrs. Wood-

bee, "and receive the united thanks of the corporal, with our own, for the undeviating care you have taken of your charge."

"Well, Ma'am!" responded Bill Stumpit, "I must run the risk, I suppose, of being broke; but I should like to have had ye longer with me. I've got used to company, d'ye see, and what I'm to do alone, for the time to come, I don't know."

"Perhaps we shall hear of a Mrs. Stumpit," remarked Leonard, looking archly at his mother.

"A Mrs. what, Sir?" said the old Peninsular. "No, no, young gentleman," continued he; "Bill Stumpit, or what is left of him, isn't going into drill again, take his word for it."

At this juncture a post chaise and pair, for the first time since it swung upon its hinges, drew up at the gate of Paradise Lodge, and from the interior glided—for

there was no appearance of the ordinary gait known as a walk—Doctor Starkie the Oxford double-first prize-man.

Leonard was prepared to see him—quite prepared—but the sight of the parenthesis, as the doctor came smiling up the gravel path, sent the blood back into his heart, and the tinge of ruddy health upon his cheek faded into the paleness of the lily. Old scenes rushed in a torrent upon his memory, and there was not one but he would willingly have buried in oblivion.

Doctor Starkie expressed himself as being in a most felicitous state at meeting with his dear young friend again, and shook Leonard with both hands, and held him off so as to be able to examine him minutely from head to heel, and conveyed a decided opinion that he had grown much handsomer, and more like his mother than ever.

Nothing and no one escaped Doctor

Starkie, and such was his excellent humour with the world in general, that he praised and lauded all that his eyes fell upon.

Paradise Lodge was an elysium in itself, and the old Peninsular a living monument of heroic deeds. The mechanical arrangement of the hook did not escape his admiration, and he thought the bit of British oak a perfect model. The birds, too, were worthy of the attention of the most enthusiastic of ornithologists, and he should take an early opportunity of mentioning them to a few of the learned societies, with the view of their becoming liberal purchasers.

Time, however, pressed, and if he might suggest that, provided the luggage was ready—it could have been held in his hat, and that he knew—it would be better, perhaps, to commence the journey without further delay; and the parenthesis came out

remarkably strong as he concluded the proposition.

No objection was offered to this, and in silence the old Peninsular watched the concluding preparations for their departure. Many kind words were spoken in acknowledgment of his hospitality and kindness; but Bill Stumpit appeared too much moved to speak, and stood staring with his Cyclops' eye in silence,

A few more brief units of the hour, and the old Peninsular was straining his optic in watching a yellow post-chaise being whirled away in the distance. A cloud of dust arose, and was blown high into the air as the rapid wheels increased in velocity, and as long as he could see even this, he still continued his riveted and earnest gaze. At length there was nothing, not even a sound, to mark the course it took, and then he turned upon his bit of British oak, and brushed away a tear.

CHAPTER III.

CORPORAL CRUMP was not one of those easily excited and nervous individuals to be put greatly out of his way—in the diction of household words—by a mere trifle; but had a shell ploughed its way through the general shop into the little back settlement, and burst then and there, he could scarcely have evinced greater astonishment or consternation than he displayed at the contents of the letter which he then held in his hand.

Short—of necessity—and quick was the corporal's march as he continued to peruse,

in a muttered tone, the astounding document; and, from the laborious pains which he bestowed upon the work, it appeared that he intended to make himself complete master of each word and syllable down, perhaps, to the crossing of the T's, and dotting of the I's.

The longest as well as the most fleeting of tasks pertaining to humanity, must have an end, unless, indeed, a Chancery suit may be considered in the light of an exception, and, at length, the corporal, perfect to the nicest particular, carefully folded the letter in its pristine creases, and threw it on the table before him.

“ If wonders should ever come to an end,” soliloquised he, “ it will be when the world does.”

At the conclusion of this sage remark he resumed his march up and down the back settlement, blowing, rather than whistling, the popular air of “ The girls we left behind us.”

This vent, however, did not seem sufficient for the escape of the excitement, which had risen to a pressure of something like a hundred and twenty to the square inch, and he therefore resolved to try what the powers and parts of speech would accomplish.

“ Women are rum-uns !” ejaculated Corporal Crump. “ There’s no getting over or under, through or out of that fact. I haven’t had a great deal to do with the feminine sex throughout my life, but experience tells me that women are rum-uns ! There’s no calculating, with anything like certainty, what they’ll do or what they won’t do. To-day they think one thing, to-morrow another. It’s all white at one time, and all black sooner afterwards than anybody would suppose the change could be made in. In case they say they will, you’d think they would, by the way in which they express themselves ; but the odds are even

that round comes their weather vane in a jiffy from south by west to north by east. Somebody said, if my memory doesn't deceive me, that if they will, they *will*, depend on't; but if they won't, they *won't*, and there's an end on't, and, in my opinion, that chap spoke exactly the truth of the matter. Oh dear me," sighed the Corporal, "women *are* rum-uns!" and to the great amazement of Jacob Giles, who was occupied in serving a customer in the shop, he flung open the door of the back settlement, and gave a full-length view of his upright, stiff, and wiry figure.

Jacob felt amazed, and expressed the feeling in his looks. Was the care which had been taken to preserve the secret inviolable thus to be cast aside, and recklessly sent to sport with fortune?

"Do you consider yourself accountable for your acts?" inquired the little general

shopkeeper, after convincing himself that the substance palpable to his vision was that moulded in the form of Corporal Crump, “or am I to take the responsibility?”

“All right, comrade,” replied the old soldier. “I know what I’m about, and if you’ll step this way presently, you shall know too.”

With a manner more contracted, if not more abrupt than usual, Jacob administered to the wants of his customer, and with a brain—for curiosity increased with years—full of speculation, he hastened to the confines of the back settlement.

“They’re trapped,” said the Corporal.

Jacob Giles repeated the mystical words, but appeared to derive no information from them.

“Bagged by jingo!” added Corporal Crump.

Dark, however as that celebrated solar

eclipse which should have taken place, the little general shopkeeper remained—figuratively speaking—behind his bit of smoked glass, staring at vacancy.

“I was afeard how it would be,” continued the Corporal, dolefully. “Something told me things wouldn’t remain on the square long when I gave up the command to that old figure-head Bill Stumpit. He was a good soldier once; but what can be expected when the third of a man’s shot away?”

A glimmer of light now broke through the smoked glass.

“Is—is anything wrong in Paradise?” hesitatingly inquired Jacob.

“Everything,” replied Corporal Crump with an unusual wildness of manner. “The entire stock of crockery’s gone to everlasting smash.”

“Perils of the deep!” ejaculated the little

general shopkeeper, raising his hands. "Tell me all about it. What's the matter?—Do speak."

"Powder, tow, tinder, and brimstone!" exclaimed the old soldier with unusual irritability. "Arn't I letting fly the words, comrade, as hard as I can let 'em drive? Don't I tell ye that the entire stock of crockery's gone to everlasting smash?"

Jacob Giles rubbed his nose, and replied "Certainly."

"Very good then!" rejoined the Corporal, "that's what I mean. But if you're not satisfied with an outline of the manœuvres which have stole a march upon us, there are the particulars," continued he, handing the letter to Jacob, which had caused so much perturbation in his mind.

"Why, where did this come from?" inquired the little general shopkeeper, examining the superscription.

“Miss Clara sent Bridget with it not three minutes since,” responded the Corporal.

“Perils of the deep!” again exclaimed Jacob Giles, at the end of the first paragraph of the epistle. “Persuaded of the necessity of returning home and confident of the——.”

“There, there!” interrupted Corporal Crump, “keep the pleasure of reading it all to yourself, comrade. I know every word, and would repeat them backwards for a small wager. Birds are said to be caught easily if you can put a pinch of salt on their tails, and darn my old coat if it doesn’t seem too true to be denied.”

“And will arrive this very day,” muttered Jacob, as he devoured the information with an avidity which can scarcely be described.

“Without so much as giving an hour’s notice of the movement,” remarked Corporal Crump, with more ill-humour than he had ever yet displayed upon any subject, “and

taking us all by surprise; it's what I call mutinous. What was the use, I should like to be informed, of my slipping about this neighbourhood like a thief in the dark, and wearing a hat," continued he, pointing to the brigandish-looking beaver, occupying a remote corner of the back settlement, "more to cover my face than my head, when directly my back was turned, or soon afterwards, all one's care is set at nought, and straight into mischief they go, like moths into a candle?"

"But I don't see," observed Jacob; "but I don't see—"

"Nor I either," interrupted the Corporal, impatiently. "It's impossible that any one should through such a haze of circumstances."

"But I was going to add," resumed the little general shopkeeper, for it was part of his kindly nature to find excuses for the

conduct of others, "that being discovered, I don't see what Mrs. Woodbee was to do, otherwise than to return home. If the poor dear lady hadn't come by her own free will, they might have dragged her."

"Not if I'd been by her elbow," observed the Corporal, sternly. "They wouldn't have dragged her, comrade, if I'd been within a musket's length."

"But you were not," argued Jacob, "and that makes a wide difference. They pounced upon her, doubtlessly, like a hawk upon a fledgling, and she yielded perhaps, my friend, from a cause which often makes a stouter heart than hers quail in the battle of life—necessity."

"Well, well!" said Corporal Crump, as if he partly, at least, coincided in this opinion. "I may have been somewhat too hasty in my judgment; but it does seem hard that one's care and trouble should be

turned over, when least expected, like a pail of suds."

"Time reveals most things," replied the little general shopkeeper, "and I think, with patience, that we shall find Mrs. Woodbee has acted neither hastily nor unwisely."

Corporal Crump administered upon his own breast a sonorous thwack, with the intent, it appeared, of correcting some feelings within, and gave a succession of quick double-knocks between Jacob's shoulders, in unlimited approval of the sentiments which he had expressed.

"Two heads are said to be better than one," remarked the old soldier, "and I know that two hearts are."

There was a slight bustle in the shop at this moment, a sound which might have been conjectured as the effect of leaves agitated by the dying wind at eventide.

It proved however, to be the rapidly revolving skirts of Doctor—in the absence of his stiff partner his title will be renewed—Grimes's coat, as that pounder of drugs came with a whirl among piles of Cheshire cheeses, bales of calico, barrels of the real Dorset, and other miscellaneous articles comprising the stock of the general shop.

“Is anybody here? is nobody here?” quickly asked the apothecary, turning round as if set on an easy-going pivot.

“Oh yes, Doctor, here we are,” replied Jacob, making his appearance from the murky depths of the back settlement.

“Come,” rejoined the doctor, panting like a coursed hare, “that's right! wouldn't have missed ye for a shilling. Just come from the Oaks? Have ye heard what's happened?”

Jacob was about replying in the affirma-

tive; but the corporal checked him with a hidden dig in the ribs from behind.

“Ye—no,” returned he, “that is to say, not exactly, perhaps.”

“Hoped I should be the first to tell ye,” rejoined the breathless apothecary, “Like to carry the freshest news at all times. Who do you think is to be at—”

“If that’s all,” broke in the Corporal, suddenly appearing above Jacob’s head like a poplar above a pollard, “we’ll not trouble you, Doctor. The intelligence, Sir, so to speak, is crusted.”

“What, are *you* back again?” ejaculated the apothecary, with as much amazement as if an apparition of one of his late lamented patients stood before him.

“If I’m not,” rejoined Corporal Crump, “the counterfeit’s so good, that it’ll pass, I know.”

“What news for Margaret!” exclaimed Doctor Grimes, exultingly; and making a firm pull to get his hat well over his eyes, away he went at a pace which made the tails of his coat stand out like buckram.

CHAPTER IV.

DARK, heavy tapestry fell around a deep bay window, through the lattice-worked panes of which the moon beams stole, throwing a varied light upon the walls of the apartment and streaking long, gaunt shadows upon the floor. In the distance they danced glitteringly in bars of liquid silver as the night wind swept in ripples the bosom of the lake, and darting through the dew drops, studding the greensward, myriads of stars flashed as brightly on earth, as those then glistening in the realms above.

In the recess, and commanding a full view of the brilliant moon-lit scene, sat Alice Woodbee, and a second chair, within a few feet of hers was occupied by the proud proprietor of the Oaks, and the manors thereunto belonging.

For an hour they had been left alone, and for an hour not a sentence or word had dropped from either of their lips. The silence was most awkward—a pause of the most unpleasant kind; but neither seemed disposed to break it.

Scrupulously particular with his promise, as he would have been in meeting his acceptance, Tobias Woodbee received his wife and son as if they had been from home, for a time, with his full leave and concurrence. He shook both by their hands, and even, after a moment's hesitation, went to the unexpected length of saluting his wife's cheek. There was a formality in the action which

conveyed a feeling not deeper than the skin ; but it had the effect of rendering the reception much less embarrassing. Regarding Leonard, he was agreeably surprised to witness such an alteration for the better in his health, and said so with a frankness expressive, one might think, of the honesty of the assertion. He had smiles for both, and no shades of a frown for either, and a stranger would have reasonably supposed that Tobias Woodbee was a pattern of a husband, and the finest sample of a father capable of production, let the search for the jewel be never so wide.

The dinner—that to which the apothecary had been invited—passed off remarkably well, and nothing could exceed the apparent delight of Doctor Starkie, as the good humour of his patron became more strongly developed as the evening advanced. Quietly, and in a way beyond being de-

scribed with anything like accurateness, the Oxford double-first prize-man applauded everything done and said to the echo, and the parenthesis looked fixed as he often glanced in triumph towards Alice with eyes which spoke as clearly as eyes were ever known to speak:—" 'Tis I who have done this, remember, *I* who can do and undo."

Hours passed swiftly and smoothly as were ever turned from the cycle of Time, and the pleasant little apothecary of Grundy's Green quitted the Oaks with the firm conviction that a more united family he had not eaten a nicer selected, better-chosen dinner, withal, since he walked the hospitals. Whatever differences might have existed, they were now healed, and he resolved to promulgate this intelligence to the entire neighbourhood between the next rising of the sun and setting of that luminary.

Upon the apothecary's departure, Doctor

Starkie observed that he desired a private conference with his inestimable young pupil, and, somewhat to Leonard's dismay, he looped an arm within one of his, and took him out of the room, with a force slightly blended with persuasion.

For an hour they had been left alone, and for an hour not a word or sentence had dropped from either of their lips. One had much to say, however, and she felt that the present was too precious to be lost. Faltering words rose to die inaudibly upon her tongue. She knew not how to begin, and yet her heart told her that each moment but added to the danger of delay.

Oh, that he would say something! She could bear reproaches, coarse as even he could speak them, better than this terrible silence. His affected welcome and kindness she saw was mere shallow acting—a ray of pale, watery sunshine, which sometimes

precedes the gloom—and that the outside varnish scarcely screened the gaping clefts beneath. He had made a promise, however, and Tobias Woodbee entertained too high notions of respectability, and what was due to his character, to forfeit a word of it. The immediate successor of the great man on 'Change possessed lofty notions of promises, and every button would have flown off the white waistcoat at the ghost of a suspicion being circulated that he had not kept the strictest faith in every engagement of his life, whether coming under the head of commercial, political, or social.

There he sat with a hand placed beneath the treasured garment, and across his breast, while the other drummed an imaginary tune upon an arm of the chair, for no sound came from it. As far as the uncertain light permitted the picture to be brought out with correctness, the portrait of Tobias

Woodbee appeared proud, triumphant, and satisfied.

“Can you—will you listen to me?” at length fell in a low, plaintive voice upon his ear.

The respectable head of the proprietor of the Oaks bent slowly forwards, and regaining its perpendicular in the same measured form, an affirmative might be supposed to have been thus signalised.

“I need not ask,” said Alice, in the same tone, “whether my conduct, in quitting your roof, deeply offended you—that I know. But,” continued she, “that step would never have been taken, had I then had what I now hope to possess.”

“May I inquire what that is, Madam?” returned her husband, with infinite politeness, if with little warmth.

“A patient hearing,” replied Alice, calmly. For the third time the respectable

head signified that a silent assent was given.

And the quick words—words uttered in a soft, apprehensive whisper—were poured into his ears, and the listener edged his chair nearer and nearer to her who spoke them. He no longer drummed an imaginary air, neither was a hand thrust among the dainty plaits beneath the white waistcoat ; but, leaning forward, he clutched the arms of the seat, and breathed like one whose breath was hard to get.

The moonbeams streamed through the lattice-worked panes of the bay window brighter and brighter yet, and the long, gaunt shadows on the walls began to dwindle into pigmies ; but still he listened.

“ To be deceived ; for *him* to be a popinjay ! ”

Beads of cold sweat oozed from his brow.

“ A cuckold ! ”

An oath, deep and blasting burst from his tongue.

“ He would —;” but his utterance was choked.

“ Stay!” exclaimed the soft, trembling voice, “ and hear me to the end. As husband and wife—in the holy meaning of those words—we have never been, perhaps never can be ; but an Allseeing Eye knows that I never deceived you in thought, word, or deed. What I have now told you, and what yet remains for you to learn, was far from my wish to withhold even for a moment, had I dared to make the communication. It was not, however, from any fear of consequences to myself or your honor —”

“ Damnation !” muttered he, wringing his hands convulsively together.

“ It was not from any fear of these,” resumed Alice, “ that I became a fugitive and wanderer, but the dread of —”

“Tell me no more,” interrupted the wretched man, in a strange, unearthly tone. “I see all, all,” continued he. “I was the fool and you the—ha, ha, ha!” and the wild laugh jarred upon the ear like a shriek of misery. “My boy, too! To make him a victim, and me a devil!”

“Suppress these feelings,” returned she. “I have still more to say.”

“Unless you’d drive me mad,” added he, jumping upon his feet, “speak not another word. There’s a fire here,” continued he, thumping his breast, “which can only be quenched by death. I’ll murder —”

With that word his lips closed, and his head drooping gradually on one side, he dropped upon the floor as if a bullet had passed through his brain.

A scream, loud and long, echoed through the house from room to room, startling many a drowsy bat in the oaken wainscots.

Within a few brief seconds Doctor Starkie bore away the inanimate form of Alice in his arms, and ashy as were her lips he would then, dead as she looked, have smothered them with burning kisses, had not her weeping child been near to guard her from his sensual touch.

CHAPTER V.

"IF these days be so particularly enlightened," remarked Corporal Crump. occupying that coziest of cozy seats, the old arm chair, in the bar-parlour of the Harrow and Pitchfork, "if these days be so particularly enlightened," repeated he, "as some people say, it's my opinion Folly must hold the candle."

Mistress Twigg felt almost sorry that somebody, besides herself, was not present to benefit by so erudite a remark, and yet that buxom relict of the departed unknown

would have admitted, had the secrets of her heart been revealed, that to be alone with the corporal was a treat of no common order.

“I don’t know how it is or why it is,” continued he, musingly; “but there seems to be a kind of rabid movement now-a-days, to improve everybody and everything, although, as far as I have yet seen, folks neither live longer nor die easier.”

Mistress Twigg observed, that as far as her practical knowledge extended, she felt justified in entertaining an opinion so perfectly similar, that it might properly be compared to a twin currant on the same stalk.

“I am not one of those either,” said the Corporal, “who think there’s nothing like the good old days of Adam and Eve.”

The widow blushed like the roseate morn, for a slight sketchy outline of the primitive

costume of that early period in the world's history, at that moment presented itself to her mental vision.

"It's by no means uncommon," continued Corporal Crump, "to find people giving praise to nothing but what's old, barring always a woman, who, if her word is to be taken, never grows ancient; but if I'm any judge, the scales of the past and the present are pretty evenly balanced. The pull is not great on either side."

The hostess expressed herself satisfied of the statement being grafted upon unquestionable and veritable fact.

"Do what we may," resumed the Corporal, "say what we please, dance, limp, sing, or weep; the beginning of life will remain the same as it has been, and so will its end."

The widow's capacious bosom heaved a corresponding sigh, and with a shake of the

head she added, that "it was very true, remarkably so."

"Speaking of life," continued the old soldier, who appeared inclined to retain the thread of the discussion, "I often think what histories the newspapers contain under the head of births, deaths, and marriages."

Mistress Twigg looked intently upon the pointed toe of her buckled slipper, but made no rejoinder. She began to feel a flutter within, caused by these words, of no ordinary kind.

"Ah!" ejaculated Corporal Crump, referring to the white-washed ceiling directly above his head, as if a few notes might be referred to from that quarter, "there's a great deal in those few words, Charlotte, births, deaths, and marriages."

It was very strange that he should thus dwell upon them, at least so thought the relict of the departed Twigg, and her

slipper began to beat time to the whirligig of thoughts in her brain, and the crimson ribands rustled in a way which fully indicated the condition of the feelings of the wearer.

Perchance, and flattering hope prompted the pleasing thought, Corporal Crump was arriving at a state of focus.

“Our acquaintance, Charlotte,” said the old soldier, and his voice sounded to the widow’s ear as soft, and far more musical than a well-played flute or shepherd’s pipe, “our acquaintance, Charlotte,” repeated he, “is not of yesterday’s date. We have known each other long enough to understand each other, I believe, and if I’ve not spoken plainly out—”

It was coming then; the question—*that* question which she had once heard before, was on the air-trigger of being popped again. No wonder that the bar-parlour,

lemons, and teaspoons started off in a waltz. The punch-bowl threw a somerset, and the corporal stood on his head.

It—that is to say, whatever it was—passed. All was still, save those gushing emotions which rise from loving hearts, like sparkles of light from wine.

The corporal, lemons, teaspoons, and punch-bowl, resumed their wonted places and positions, and none appeared the worse for those movements which, in engineering diction would be described, eccentric.

“If I’ve not spoken plainly out,” those were the last words she heard, and to her inexpressible joy these followed; “force of circumstances, Charlotte, alone caused me to halt in my inclination. I did not see my way clear enough to ask you to become an old soldier’s wife before ; but if you’ll be content to share my pension—”

She would, and there was her hand as a pledge for her word.

Corporal Crump accepted the guerdon as well became a gallant spirit, and pressing it a little below the Waterloo medal which garnished his breast, he gave a loud explosive kiss upon the widow's lips, sounding not unlike detonating powder.

"While my poor missis lives," said the Corporal, after a slight pause—and a shade of sorrow passed over his features as he spoke—"and Miss Clara remains a forlorn, helpless orphan, Charlotte, we mustn't forget that the pension has some claims upon it. I couldn't give up all the pension for what is called pin money."

"Pin money!"

The hostess of the Harrow and Pitchfork thought of a certain private, well-protected secret drawer, the key of which then hung

at her girdle, and laughed pleasantly, not sarcastically, at the idea of pin money.

“I don’t mean to raise false hopes or fabulous expectations concerning my property,” replied she with the smallest approach to the minutest display of vanity; “but for all our earthly wants, dear Richard, and indeed comforts, I have enough—perhaps a little more.”

Corporal Crump’s countenance became illuminated with this intelligence. The “little more” topped it with the cream of perfect satisfaction, and fanned the embers of his affection until they began to glow in a white heat.

“Charlotte,” rejoined he, impressively, “we are not children; not of that age to require being fed with a spoon, and therefore I shall forbear from saying anything which might lay me open to the charge of being spooney. At the same time, if I

were to give vent to all my feelings on this occasion, you'd find some of them as fresh as water-cresses, and in saying that I look with an anxious hope that as little delay as possible will take place before we march to that church, where I'll make you mine, and endow you with those few earthly goods I possess, together with as liberal a share of the pension as circumstances will permit, it's no more than an old soldier *may* say, upon the only security which he has at this moment to offer—his honor."

Mistress Twigg, like a fond happy woman that she was, entertained the most comprehensive faith in all that the corporal asserted, and, therefore, why she considered it necessary to raise the corner of her black silk apron to her eyes at this moment, and go through the ceremony of shedding two tears, cannot be explained. Speculation may trace their source from the fountains

of joy; but there they were, big and—it is supposed—briny.

“I shall ever make your comforts, Richard, the study of those remaining days which may yet be spared me,” sobbed the jolly widow.

“A wife who studies that, Charlotte,” replied he, “knows her duty, and, as a great improvement upon the knowledge, does it.”

“We can’t expect to be happy in this world, or be worthy of blessings,” rejoined Mistress Twigg with the apron still at the corners of her eyes, “unless we make our homes comfortable; and how is a home to be comfortable, unless the husband of it is at peace, and enjoys his ease?”

“Well would it be, Charlotte,” said the Corporal, with a gravity of manner amounting almost to the solemn, “if that question was written in letters of gold in every household in England. Many a man would

then sit by his own fireside, who now makes it his care to keep as wide from it as possible."

The hostess of the Harrow and Pitchfork felt flattered at the compliment; and, it is fairly conjectured, that a betrothed scarcely could be found within the belt of this sublunary planet, on better terms with herself and her lover, than Mistress Twigg.

"There is just one thing I will mention," returned she. "You have been generous enough, dear Richard, to speak of my share of the pension. I beg to state that whatever that may be, is at your free disposal. I'll not take one sixpence of it, and if"—the widow drew in a long breath, like the hiss of a stray goose—"I may be guilty of one act of liberality without provoking the censure of my neighbours, and having false motives scored to what I do, without so much as ever thinking of them, let me tell

you that willingly, not grudgingly, Richard, I place at your disposal my savings, and they amount to a sum which, to see clearly, requires no strong magnifying glass. I'll not take upon myself the responsibility," continued the widow, looking down the sides of her nose, "to point out the ways and means by which my savings may be applied in accordance with my own wishes; but should a slender hint not be objectionable, I will be brazen-faced enough to observe, that if the whole is appropriated to the uses of Mrs. Lieutenant Somerset and her pretty daughter, I shall not consider that I saved a farthing, without getting a fully penny by my thrift."

"I could stand cool in some positions," observed Corporal Crump. "I have done so, although *I* say it; but there's no resisting force like this. Charlotte, you're an angel!" and seizing the object of his affec-

tions in a strong gripe, he would doubtlessly — to apply figurative language — have smothered her with his kisses, had not the chink-wink twang, chink-wink twa-a-ang of a horn suddenly caused him to—still figuratively speaking—ground arms.

“The mail,” whispered Mrs. Twigg, with a finger upon her lip, “the mail’s coming.”

The corporal, in a moment, became bolt upright, stiff, and perpendicular as a ramrod.

“That Jonathan,” said he with a martial frown, “and I had better not meet I think.”

“Not meet?” exclaimed the widow, feigning a degree of astonishment which she most decidedly did not entertain. “I thought you were the best of friends.”

“We don’t always command the force of circumstances,” mysteriously remarked the Corporal. “I’d rather not meet that Jonathan to-night.”

“Come, come, dear Richard,” replied

Mistress Twigg, pleased as every woman is at the display of jealous rivalry for her charms, "you have no cause to pick a quarrel with Jonathan. He always spoke of you as you deserve, and never said a word to me but what might be repeated to your face. Be just to Jonathan," pleaded the widow, "as he has been just to you."

A shout of laughter now broke from the vicinity of the bar, and being taken up, or seconded, by a hoarser description of merriment, the noise was prodigious in the extreme.

"I said so," hallooed a voice, "I said how it would be, widder. A man that goes up the road is sure to come down again. Up pumpkin and down squash. That's your sauce for Michaelmas!"

"What's the toast now?" croaked the Guard. "Is it the King with no heel-taps? Haw, haw, h-a-w."

“Shouldn’t wonder but what he’s got a milder sort by this time, eh, widder?” remarked Jonathan with a wink.

The hostess simpered, that her customers were sometimes rather more than she could manage.

“Take a partner then, widder,” replied Jonathan, “and if I had the choice of being either your sleeping one, or t’other kind, I wouldn’t occupy a whole week to consider of it.”

This observation caused a slight uneasiness in Mistress Twigg’s bosom, and she began to think that it might have been as well that the Corporal and Jonathan had not met.

CHAPTER VI.

THE gossips of Grundy's Green were unanimous in the report of Mrs. Woodbee's and Leonard's return to the Oaks. There could be no doubt whatever as to that fact; but whether they were coerced or induced, whether compelled by the strong arm of the law, or decoyed by more subtle means, remained a subject on which there existed a diversity of opinions, and conflicting statements.

Great was the perplexity also, upon the rumour gaining ground of the serious indisposition of the Squire and his wife. That

both should be attacked at the same time looked truly suspicious, and stories were rife that the soup, flesh, or fowl at dinner was poisoned; but whether accidentally, or otherwise, met with both supporters and defenders.

Some never thought that good would come of such a proud, consequential, hard-hearted man as Squire Woodbee was, and deplored the day that made the great house his. It was a sorry one for the poor of those parts, although they had nothing to say against the lady and Master Leonard. Poor things! they had a kind word for everybody, and how it was such a wife and son belonged to him, passed their understanding.

That bookman, too! they wondered who he could be, and what he looked at the stars so often through a spy-glass for. A few old women shook their heads at such questions, and expressed a determination of

nailing horseshoes on the thresholds of their doors in case he should pass that way. An evil eye that bookman had, and no wonder that Master Leonard withered under it. It was not for them to say all they thought, wise people never did; but if that bookman was not the devil himself, he was a nearer relation than fifth cousin.

To convey an approach to the astonishment which Miss Christina Baxter felt at the turn which things had taken, would be beyond the range of possibility, long as that range unquestionably is. She had been duly informed by the considerate corporal, of the astounding intelligence, fresh as it had arrived at the general shop, of the intended return of her dear friend and pupil of other days. Vague and undefined as the cause appeared for this most unexpected proceeding, Miss Baxter came, by a sudden

jump, to a similar conclusion with Jacob Giles, that it had been adopted from the total absence of any choice, and expressed herself fully justified in the conviction that the amiable partner of the tyrannical Bluebeard would not have cast herself again into his jaws, but that a cruel destiny had made her its helpless victim.

This was Miss Christina Baxter's sentiment, making a complete proselyte of Corporal Crump, who at once dismissed a lurking doubt, concerning the want of discretion which had been exercised by the old Peninsular, in preventing danger to his charge.

"Rest assured, gallant Sir," observed Miss Christina, "truth will discover that there is no blame whatever due to that charming veteran with the wooden leg, or my excellent and persecuted friend. They are sacrifices to a pitiless fate."

“So Miss Clara said,” replied the Corporal, musingly.

“And the fair Clara—good, sweet, pretty, modest girl that she is,” rejoined Miss Baxter, “is unquestionably correct in her surmise. But the time is so near at hand,” continued she, “when all suspense must cease, that I think it will be wiser, and more liberal to prejudge no one and nothing.”

The corporal concurred entirely with Miss Baxter, and found his reverence for the little lean governess greatly augmented at the termination of his interview.

It may be better to observe that this exceedingly slight link in the chain of events took place on the day of Mrs. Woodbee’s anticipated arrival.

But what was Miss Christina Baxter’s surprise at finding a messenger at the door of her domicile on the night of that very self-same day, in the person of Mr. James

Burly, who abruptly informed her that she was wanted as soon as the utmost despatch could transport both herself and her bandbox to the Oaks?

“Bandbox!” exclaimed the affrighted Miss Christina, as the communication completely took her breath away. “May I ask for an explanation, should it be in your power, good Mr. Burly, to render me one?”

“You shall have the best I can give, ’M,” replied Burly James, “but *reelly* my head feels a’most agoin’ to part in halves clean down the middle. I’ve got my whack of muscle, ’M,” continued he, tapping the biceps of his arms with an alternate action, “but as for strength of head I can’t boast no great deal.”

Miss Baxter sympathized.

“A little, ’M, d’ye see,” resumed the knight of the thews and sinews, drawing a hand down his low, square forehead, “seems to

shake up all my i-deas into a kind of thick yeast, which, working into a frothy sort o' wabble, leaves my brains not quite so clear as some of my neighbours' may be found."

Again Miss Baxter sympathized, but there was a slight involuntary impatience blended with her compassion.

"I never did know how to begin to tell anything," continued Mr. James Burly, "and I suppose it's too late now to learn; but if you'll let me help pack your bandbox, 'M, we shan't be a-losin' so much time."

Miss Baxter assured good Mr. Burly that, if his communication warranted the effort, her bandbox could be packed, by the assistance of her own hands alone, in less than no time.

"Well, 'M," rejoined he, "you shall soon know as much as I do, and that's not much and never was. In course I needn't tell

you who we expected back again to-day?"

So far Miss Baxter's source of information had taken precedence of Mr. Burly's.

"Very good, 'M," said the knight of the muscles, "we shall get on by an' by I see. Well! they came, and more improved condition I never seed considerin' the time they'd been in trainin'; but more partickerly Master Leonard's. Missis, as I put my eye over her, I thought still drawn a little too fine, but there was a bloom on her skin which I hadn't seen for many a day."

"I'm rejoiced to hear you say so, good Mr. Burly," returned Miss Christina Baxter with fervour. "But don't let me interrupt you. Proceed, pray proceed."

"Things seemed to go smoother than any prophet could foresee," continued Burly James, "and Master behaved himself as if

he had taken a new lesson in manners. If Missis had been a stranger, 'M, and owed him nothin', he couldn't have been more civil."

"How full of joy is such intelligence!" exclaimed Miss Baxter. "Bluebeard, perhaps, is a repentant sinner."

"Bluebeard, 'M!" ejaculated the knight of the muscles, lifting the lids of his light sky-blue eyes.

"Pardon me, good Mr. Burly," added Miss Christina, correcting herself, "I beg that you'll not let my foolish remark interrupt these interesting particulars."

"We must cut 'em short though," returned he, as if a dereliction of duty was making itself palpable through 'the frothy yeast.' "I was ordered to be quick, but it appears to me that I'm terribly afflicted with the slows, 'M."

"Nay, nay," responded Miss Baxter, "do

not reproach yourself with tardiness, good Mr. Burly."

"But I've got to go to 'pothecary Grimes's for a cataplasm on our way," added he, "and it will be ready before the bandbox, I know."

"Cataplasm?" repeated Miss Christina Baxter.

"I think it was a cataplasm," said the knight of the muscles, thoughtfully; "but at any rate its somethin' in the medical line."

"For what—for whom?" asked she.

"Thank'e, 'M, for arskin' that question," replied Burly James. "It's a wonderful assistance to me I do assure ye. Why to say who it's for," continued he, "doesn't exactly lie in my overalls; but the bettin's even that it's either for master or missis."

"What do I hear?" ejaculated Miss Baxter, with alarm.

"Fits," responded Mr. Burly.

Miss Christina raised her hands and stood mutely gazing at her informant.

"They was both took with fits in the same nick o' time," resumed he, "and not bein' used to 'em, fare badly enough, accordin' to 'pothecary Grimes. My father," continued James Burly, "was used to fits all his life, and lived to be a fine, fresh old man notwithstanding'."

"Is there the remotest degree of danger?" gasped Miss Baxter.

"Missis has come round, 'M," responded he, "but master remains quite at the t'other end of queer street."

"Am I then sent for?" inquired Miss Christina, as a new light broke through the ambiguous information.

"That's it," replied the knight of the muscles. "You've hit the right nail on the head, 'M, at last. Missis's orders are for you and bandbox to be with her as soon as

possible, and that I, on no account, was to leave either behind."

"I'm expected then to pass the night—"

"That's it, 'M," interrupted Burly James. "You are as right in that partickler as ever you were wrong in your life."

Miss Christina Baxter heard no more. Rapid, indeed, were the preparations for her departure, and with a speed rarely equalled in ordinary pedestrianism, might she have been seen trotting on her road to the Oaks.

CHAPTER VII.

It was sunset. Golden waves rose and fell upon the walls of that little haven of rest, Jacob's snugger, and the balmy breath of the summer's wind stole through a screen of flowers, decking a stand before the open window.

"Clara," said Mrs. Somerset, raising herself with difficulty, as she turned upon the sofa, "how long have I been sleeping?"

"For nearly an hour, Mamma," replied Clara, cheerfully, "and now that you have

been so good, so very good, tell me that you are better."

"I have often said so, dear one," rejoined her mother, faintly; "but I cannot do so now, not now, Clara," she added.

There was a strange foreboding tone in these words, which drove the tint from Clara's cheek, and, without knowing why, tears started to her eyes.

"Come closer to me," said Mrs. Somerset, "my voice is weak, and I would speak to you now that we're alone, Clara," and she drew her child upon her bosom, and kissed her fondly.

"And never to be parted," replied Clara, "oh tell me that!" she added. "Say that we shall always be together, never, never to be parted."

"Hush, love, hush," rejoined her mother; "'tis this grief I would have you check. The hour approaches, Clara, for your

greatest earthly trial, and for mine, that of our separation."

A wild cry rose, a cry as if a young heart had broken.

"Clara, listen to me," said Mrs. Somerset, calmly; "I have much to say, more, perhaps, than I shall live to tell. Let us waste no moments in useless grief, but rather strive to soothe the pain, pain beyond all mortal power to heal."

Scalding tears streamed from Clara's eyes, but she stifled the choking sobs, and tried to look as her mother wished.

For a few seconds not a word was spoken, the golden waves rose and fell upon the walls, and the flowers sent forth their sweetest perfume.

"Has any one been here during my sleep?" inquired Mrs. Somerset.

"Both Leonard and Miss Baxter called,"

replied Clara, "and will do so again in the course of the evening."

"How is my sister?"

"Better, much better," rejoined Clara, "but is still too weak to leave her bed."

The invalid appeared to repeat these words to herself, and murmured, "Then on earth we shall never meet again."

"Oh, Mamma, say not so!" exclaimed Clara, throwing her arms round her mother. "You are not worse, are you? Tell me that you are not."

"For your sake, if not for mine, dear one," returned Mrs. Somerset, sorrowfully, "would that I could do so!"

"Then let me fetch —."

"Not now, not now," interrupted her mother, dividing the clustering curls from Clara's hot, burning brow, and pressing her lips to it, "none must be near me now, but my own dear child. Often have I heard,"

continued she, with a voice steadied by an effort as she looked earnestly in her daughter's face, " that the world is harsh and uncharitable to the forlorn and helpless, and that those who are in the most need of friends, have to seek them generally in vain. But methinks this scarcely can be so, Clara, for we have found many friends, and few could have been more forlorn and helpless than ourselves. But He who makes the hearth desolate, who causes the widow to mourn, and the orphan to weep, mingles the cup of affliction with mercy. He who directs the storm, stays the hurricane. The hand that unbinds the wind, tempers it. In Him then, dearest, we will put our trust, and pray for that support which comes from Heaven alone."

Clara wept bitterly; but not a sound escaped her.

" For a long, long time," continued Mrs.

Somerset, twining an arm about Clara's waist, and pressing her to her bosom, "have I seen this coming hour, and, as with those generally who delay their duty, it was nigh arriving when too late for its fulfilment."

The invalid paused, as if to recruit her exhausted strength.

"The past, Clara," continued she, "as far as concerns yourself, you know. It is of the future, the hidden, unfathomed course which your frail bark must take, dear child, amid life's chequered sea, that I would speak. Think, then, well on what I say, and never let my injunction be blotted from your memory."

"To forget—oh, mother!" exclaimed Clara, "you cannot think that I could forget!"

"Nor do I, dear one," rejoined Mrs. Somerset; "but my thoughts are anxious, and I speak to you as——"

A deadly pallid hue spread itself over the features of the speaker, and the arm embracing Clara fell powerless by her side.

With a cry of terror Clara sprang upon her feet.

“Stay, love, stay,” whispered her mother, “do not leave me. I shall be better presently, much better.”

Ready to turn and fly for assistance, Clara stood clasping one of her mother’s bloodless hands, and looked as motionless as sculptured marble.

“Not yet, Clara,” said Mrs. Somerset, with her eyes riveted on her daughter; “not yet; it will not be yet,” and again she drew her to her side, with her head resting upon her breast.

“I taught you, Clara,” continued her mother, “on the night which made you a little fatherless child, to lisp your infant prayer to God for strength and resignation

under those trials and vicissitudes which it might please Him, for all-wise and inscrutable purposes, to visit you. We joined in our petition that we might bear our burden cheerfully, that we might resist temptation, and be calm under the harsh frowns and menaces of poverty and trouble. It was then that we knelt together, Clara, and supplicated for trust and reliance alone in virtue, in truth, and in God. Do you remember this?"

Remember? Her scalding tears could answer that; but she could not speak.

"Whatever sorrows or danger may beset you, dearest, when I am gone," continued her mother with slightly increased energy, "whatever griefs assail and wring your heart, bend your knee to Him whose attribute is love, and whose ear is ever open to the voice of suffering. Be again the little child when you knelt by your mother's side, and ask for that patience which the sorely

oppressed in spirit need so much. Mourn not as if you cavilled at the Almighty's decrees; but remembering that the loving and beloved in this world must part—that life passeth away like a dream—look beyond the uncertain span of poor mortality, where there are no separations, and where peace, and rest, and eternal joy await the blessed in heaven. Do this, Clara, for your own sake and for mine, and let your promise be sealed upon your dying mother's lips."

"I will, indeed I will," sobbed Clara; "not a word but I'll think of; not a duty but shall be observed; but tell me not that you are dying—oh say not that!" and she clasped her hands together, and wrung them in her agony.

"Kiss me, love," returned Mrs. Somerset, "and while I speak a few words to our kind friends, the corporal and Mr. Giles, seek your chamber, where, I hope, calmer feelings

will take possession of you. You shall not be absent from me long," continued she, seeing the reluctance with which Clara turned to tear herself away from the couch.

And then she was alone.

With ill-concealed trepidation, although each was evidently endeavouring to school his feelings, both Corporal Crump and Jacob Giles made a somewhat abrupt entry into the apartment, as if the summons they had received had shaken them from their propriety.

"My dear Mem," said the little general shopkeeper, stepping forward with the deepest solicitude in his voice and gesture, "do we hear from Miss Clara that you are worse?"

"Far, far worse," replied Mrs. Somerset, holding out a hand to Jacob, and giving the other to the corporal; "but it is not of myself that I would either think or speak

just now. It is," continued she, glancing a look full of gratitude on both, "of you whom I have to be so thankful to, and those I love, and who love me and mine. But the best of friends must part, and the oldest of comrades, Corporal, as you know full well."

Corporal Crump lifted his right hand stiffly to his brow, and saluted this sad truth in silence.

"For all your kindness," resumed Mrs. Somerset, addressing the old soldier, "and years of self-denial, and faithful service, how can I repay you sufficiently with my thanks?"

"I'd rather, Marm," replied the Corporal hoarsely, for he had been too accustomed to see the dying not to know that death was in possession of Jacob's snugger, "I'd rather, Marm," replied he, "that you'd say as little about them as may prove agreeable to yourself. If I have done my duty to

your satisfaction," and he again brought his hand to his forehead, "it's more than I can say of it's being so to my own."

"And what shall I say to you, dear friend?" continued Mrs. Somerset, turning to Jacob, "you whose roof has sheltered us so long?"

"Spare me," responded Jacob as unshed tears rose in his eyes. "Don't say anything about it, Mem, pray don't. I, I can't bear much."

"I must be brief," remarked the invalid as if communing with herself. "My strength is waning fast, and darker shadows are hovering round than those which evening casts."

"Let me go for Doctor Grimes," said Jacob in a voice scarcely articulate with grief. "The cures he works—"

A hand gently pressed upon his arm checked his praise of the apothecary.

"Hark!" cried Mrs. Somerset, "there's

a step upon the stairs," and as she spoke a gentle knock announced the advent of Leonard and Miss Baxter.

"Friends," said the invalid, smiling and extending her arms to greet them, "friends—dear beloved friends!"

"Let me hope that Clara's fears are exaggerated," responded Miss Baxter with a voice trembling with emotion as she knelt and saluted the invalid's cheek.

A shake of the head was the silent answer.

"My sister is unable to be here?" said Mrs. Somerset.

"Alas!" rejoined Leonard, "that it should be so; but she is incapable still of quitting her bed."

"Tell her," continued she, "that she was with my latest thoughts, and as in life I loved her well, so in death that love grew stronger. And now, before we part, one

word about my child—poor, helpless girl! You will all befriend the orphan; that I know; and if no earthly rewards compensate your charitable hearts, yet shall they be requited where the worm preys not, and treasures remain imperishable.”

“Fear nothing,” rejoined Corporal Crump, steadying his nether lip, “on her account, Marm. We will—” but he could say no more, and he wheeled suddenly towards the open window as if an object had attracted his attention in that quarter.

“There is one thing more I wish to add,” said Mrs. Somerset with perceptibly increasing faintness, “and that I must be pardoned for imparting to Leonard with no witness by. Give me your hands,” continued she, “before you go; you shall not be absent from me long.”

Conforming to her wish, Leonard was left alone with the dying.

CHAPTER VIII.

RAYs of waving, golden light streamed about the couch of one whose spirit, like a bird with out-stretched pinions, stood ready to soar and wing its flight—fluttering on the threshold of eternity.

Her voice was gone, but her eyes, fading with the film of death, still spoke. They told of a gentle heart at peace—one that had suffered long, but was now at rest. They told of confidence and hope, of gratitude to those who now stood weeping by—her best and long-tried friends. They

told of a mother's love, imperishable as the soul from which it springs, and over which death can claim no victory.

Her look—the last, fond look—was fixed upon her child.

Soft shadows fell upon the golden waves. Faint and fainter yet they flitted round, lingering but not departing.

And then a plaintive voice rose in tremulous accents, “Father of all mercies, vouchsafe to listen to an orphan's prayer!”

All fell upon their knees save the corporal, who stood erect with a hand to his brow in an attitude of the profoundest attention and respect.

“Thou to whom all hearts be open,” supplicated Clara, “knowest the sufferings of mine! Give me strength to bear them with meekness, for thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; and yet remembering my infirmities, bestow the clemency of

thy pity. Let the dews of thy blessing fall upon my efforts to obey thy holy laws, so that I may daily hope, and pray, that she whom it has pleased Thee to take unto Thyself, is not lost to me, but gone before."

"Amen," said the Corporal.

The shadows deepened, and the golden waves were gone.

CHAPTER IX.

STRANGE events had taken place in rapid succession of late, and that connoisseur of news, intelligence, and reports, the apothecary's stiff partner, felt an acute want of breath, as each came upon her like a galvanic shock, which she fervently trusted might not prove chronic. At the same time, her appetite grew on what it fed. It may be erroneously supposed, from repeatedly drawing the reader's attention to the apothecary and Mrs. Doctor Grimes, when transformed into a kind of human sandwich

between the domestic sheets, that they passed more than the mean time, by Shrewsbury clock, in a dormant state; but the conjecture would be founded in error. They were not unusually early to bed, or extraordinarily reluctant to rise, and it has been asserted, as regards the latter, at least, in and around Grundy's Green, by venom-tongued envy, neither particularly healthy, wealthy, nor wise.

Be this as it may, there were Mrs. Doctor Grimes and the apothecary, as they have been before seen in their respective night-caps, the one intricately frilled, and the other terminating in a plain and unpretending tassel.

Mrs. Doctor Grimes cleared her voice with a cough, sounding not unlike the sharp bark of a fox. It was a way she had, and Mrs. Doctor Grimes made it a rule to indulge in those ways which pleased her most.

The apothecary's ears pricked forward.

"I shall be sorry to disturb your repose," said the stiff partner of the firm, with a jerk of the bed clothes practically refuting the allegation, "quite sorry; but if you *can*, Sir, deny yourself a few moments of sullen pleasure by assuming a degree—limited as it must be—of confidence with the wife of your bosom, she will endeavour to forgive—if not forget—a portion of those injuries which seem to form part and parcel of the marriage lot."

"Really, Margaret," replied the apothecary, "I am not aware of being systematically cruel."

"Systematically cruel?" repeated Mrs. Doctor Grimes, raising her voice. "Hoighty toighty, Sir! Do you flatter yourself for a single moment that I should tamely submit to the most distant approach to systematic cruelty?"

“By no means,” replied the apothecary. “I should not for one instant consider it possible that you would do so, chuck.”

“Come, come,” rejoined the stiff partner, “no foolery, Sir, if you please. I disapprove of that obsolete term chuck, and having conveyed my sentiments upon this subject, you’ll study your own comfort by avoiding a repetition of it for the future.”

The apothecary promised that it should be forthwith expunged from his vocabulary.

“So far, then, I will endeavour to be satisfied,” resumed Mrs. Doctor Grimes, “although, Heaven knows, I’ve little cause to be.”

“I’m sure, Margaret,” expostulated the subdued dispenser of nauseous compounds, “I do my best. —”

“Best! yes,” snapped the sharer of his bed and partaker of his board, “I don’t say *that*, Sir, do I? If I did not take care that

you did your best, partial blame would rest on my shoulders. But what *is* your best, Sir, let me ask?"

"There's my professional reputation, Margaret," ventured the apothecary by way of a mild reproof. "I beg you'll think of that."

"Your professional reputation!" echoed Mrs. Doctor Grimes with a sneer which, although not seen, might be heard in the dark, like the sneeze of a cat. "Fortunately for me," she continued, "that I possess a stomach not easily turned. The world might call it strong, but fortified would best express it."

"Visit me with whatever vials of your wrath you please," rejoined the apothecary in a melodramatic tone; "but spare, Margaret, spare my professional reputation."

"He, he, he!" laughed Mrs. Doctor. "He, he, he! Poor misguided, duped, and confiding victims."

"May I inquire, without offence, Margaret," said the apothecary with serious apprehensions, "to whom you refer as poor, misguided, duped, and confiding victims?"

"Run your fore-finger down each column of your ledger," rejoined Mrs. Doctor Grimes, with wormwood in every word. "From the day you first rolled a pill or shook a bottle, to this, and every Christian and surname you come to is one of them."

"Margaret," returned the apothecary, "I cannot submit to this. I shall leave my bed."

"As it would chill me, Sir," added she, with a determination which he thought it advisable not to oppose, "you'll do nothing of the sort. I am merely giving you a little bit of my mind, which is nothing more than my privilege and my pleasure."

"It was not always so," said the apothecary.

cary moistly, for his injuries moved him to tears. "It was not always so, Margaret."

"I am quite aware of that," responded Mrs. Doctor Grimes," and will therefore not trouble you, Sir, to waste your breath in informing me of what I already know. We all have our moments of weakness," continued she, "and I am far from being regardless or forgetful of mine."

His professional reputation having been stabbed to the quick, the apothecary was bleeding inwardly, and he felt it prudent to abandon the unequal contest.

"Ho!" ejaculated the stiff partner, after a slight check, "you're sulky now, Sir, I suppose. Is that it?"

"No," replied the poor little apothecary of Grundy's Green, "not sulky, Margaret, but wounded."

"In that case," she rejoined, "you'd bet-

ter exercise some of your boasted skill upon yourself, although if the case be a serious one, and my advice was asked, I should suggest the precaution of calling in the first old woman you might happen to meet in the village."

This was the unkindest cut of all, and the apothecary winced and flinched under the stiletto of her satire.

"I have generally remarked," said he, finding there was no avail in either silence or submission, "that these unhappy differences, Margaret, appear to arise from what I may call, nothing. I am aware, from the experience of a former occasion, that it is useless to ask what have I done? but may I inquire, in order to put an end to the present one, what you require me to do?"

Mrs. Doctor Grimes soliloquized in a tone that no whisper ever equalled in soft-

ness, "Having oiled the screw well, I'll now proceed to turn it."

Her voice was again husky, and she cleared away the impediment with the same sharp, fox-like bark.

"Yielding to your express desire," replied Mrs. Doctor Grimes aloud, "as a weakness for which I ought to be ashamed of myself, I will endeavour to be as explicit as possible. It's my wish," continued she, "to learn generally the state of circumstances, as they may have presented themselves to your notice throughout the day; but in order that no mistake should arise, I'll proceed to put those questions which comprehend the greatest interest."

"Do, Margaret," rejoined the apothecary, greatly relieved with the prospect of a cessation of hostilities; "I'll answer every one."

"That I'll be bound you will," returned

the stiff partner, "before getting a wink of sleep to-night. In the first place, then, where is that mealy-faced young girl going; for I don't suppose that she will have *quite* the assurance to remain under an unmarried man's roof now?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the apothecary, "Clara's gone to live with Miss Baxter, Margaret."

"Miss Baxter, eh?" snapped Mrs. Doctor Grimes. "Upon my word, I should like to know how Miss Baxter, who, it is well known, can scarcely keep body and soul together, is to keep other people."

"The burden will not fall on her shoulders, I'm certain," observed the apothecary; "even Jacob was paid, and as regularly, too, as clockwork."

"So he gave out," replied Mrs. Doctor Grimes, with a sneer which was again audible; "but I very much doubt the truth

of *that* tale. Where was the money to come from, I should like to be informed?"

"But it is not because that we are ignorant of the resources—"

"Yes, it is," interrupted the stiff partner, "that's the very cause for any one but a fool's believing ridiculous trash. Seeing's believing ; but what else is, I should like to know?"

"*I* was paid," argued the apothecary, "every sixpence."

"You must have blushed to have taken it," returned Mrs. Doctor Grimes. "However, let that pass, as you're qualified by law to perpetrate extortion. And what *is* to become of the man Crump?" continued she, in a caustic tone.

"They talk of a marriage being settled between him and Mistress Twigg," replied he, meekly; for he feared the subject might prove an exciting one.

“Ho, in—deed!” exclaimed the stiff partner, “it’s come to that at last! Upon my word, Madam Twigg has given herself infinite pains in stooping to pick up nothing. A private soldier, who I dare say’s been flogged many a time, and shown the excellent quality of his legs in battle, by running away faster than any one else.”

“Why, Margaret!” ejaculated the apothecary, horror-stricken at the libel, “he wears a Waterloo medal.”

“A pewter counterfeit,” rejoined Mrs. Doctor Grimes, “or one he got out of a pawnbroker’s shop.”

The apothecary groaned, and began to look wistfully at the night-bell above him.

“What junketings we shall have with our new husband!” sneered the stiff partner. “And then the caps we shall wear, and the silks we shall buy—why the Harrow and Pitchfork won’t hold us all. We must have

the roof raised a story I'm sure, and the doors widened."

The apothecary deemed it wiser to say nothing in answer to this explosion.

"And how is that Mrs. Runaway Woodbee?" resumed Mrs. Doctor Grimes. "If I had the opportunity of advising her unfortunate husband, I should suggest the expediency of fixing a heavy chain on one of her ankles at least, and having it riveted to the bed-post."

"My patient is not so well to-day, Margaret," simply replied the apothecary.

"If all your patients were in the same state," rejoined she, for the announcement of Mistress Twigg's anticipated union with Corporal Crump turned the microscopic quantity of the milk of human kindness in her bosom into curds, "it would not occasion the smallest astonishment in any one who knew you as well as I do; but the less

said, perhaps, about that the better, as the fault lies more with the Act of Parliament which legalizes manslaughter, than the perpetrators themselves of the family bereavements."

How often had it startled him from peaceful sleep, with its shrill, piercing tongue! but now that he would have given a moderate premium for a summons to escape the ordeal he was undergoing, the night-bell was as mute as the metal from which it had been cast when unsmelted ore.

"And that ill-used and much-abused gentleman, Mr. Woodbee," returned the stiff partner, "what progress is he making towards recovery—that is to say, supposing any can be made, while the present deception is being practised upon him of swallowing your stuff?"

"The Squire continues, Margaret," responded the apothecary, with spirits below

Zero, "in a state of extreme danger. The blood vessels extending across the os frontis—"

"Os fiddlesticks!" interrupted Mrs. Doctor Grimes. "I want none of your outlandish gibberish here, Sir, and if you think to blind your ignorance by—"

"Ha, ha!" His heart leaped again. The bell! glad tidings. No matter for whom—profitable or profitless. It called him hence, and that was enough.

CHAPTER IX.

HOWEVER sad—for she had her sorrowful moments like other mortals—Miss Christina Baxter might occasionally be, she possessed that rarest of virtues of concealing, if not forgetting, her own cares in order that she might lessen those of her friends and neighbours—but to be a neighbour of Miss Baxter was to be her friend.

The heart of the poor little lean Samaritan beat with unusual depression, and as she stuck the skewer of a poker into the miniature fire, to raise a flame under the hissing,

spluttering, copper kettle, she made as much noise as possible for the purpose, probably, of driving away those imps of evil the demons blue, by whom she appeared to be encircled. At the conclusion of this feat she rubbed the bright and knobby end of the poker smoothly down her nose, and seemed to be refreshed by the movement.

“My dear Clara,” remarked she to her companion, who sat on the opposite side of the fire-place, “I’ll certainly light the candle, and make an unusually good cup of tea this evening; for really there’s anything but a cheerful appearance about us, and there is nothing more catching, not even the typhus fever itself or the measles, than what a maiden aunt of mine—poor dear! she was attached to cats and white mice—used to call the dumps. If you have the dumps, as she frequently observed, lock yourself in a room and fling the key

out of window, so that nobody can get near you, and you can get near nobody. Then either cry, grumble, growl, howl or—the wicked maiden aunt sometimes added if no clergyman was near—swear at your ease; but be particular that not a creature hears you, and never leave *that* room until fully convinced of having made a fool of yourself. That was my maiden aunt's cure for the dumps," concluded Miss Baxter, with a perfect triumph over her own.

"But we cannot control our spirits," replied Clara; "they so much depend upon the circumstances by which we are surrounded."

"Doubtlessly so," rejoined Miss Baxter, "but by the dumps my maiden aunt—she who was attached to cats and white mice—rather referred to a bad temper, I suspect, than the gloom which care, of necessity, *must* bring."

“Ah!” sighed Clara, “how little of life is without its gloom! I never felt happy yet without the dread of coming evil.”

“Yes, my dear,” returned Miss Christina Baxter, blowing the cotton wick of a candle into a shower of sparks, as a preliminary to a permanent ignition; “but that is not exactly the Christian trust which we are desired to put in the future. ‘Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,’ says the Divine law, and if we are in continual fear of the succeeding hour, it is at direct variance with the injunction which bids us not to take too much heed of the morrow.”

“And yet apprehension for the future,” added Clara, “seems to be linked to our very being. Who can say that he feels his happiness secure even for a moment?”

“Certainly not,” said Miss Baxter, “if his happiness is based on a perishable foundation; but we are taught,” continued she,

“not to build our houses upon the sand, and our own senses tell us that if we do so they must fall. I am not a lecturer or philosopher, Heaven knows! but what I have seen of the world forces upon me this conclusion, that as everything belonging to it is ever on the change, that as everything on which we can raise an earthly hope must perish, happiness can alone be attained by looking beyond the world. Too many of us live day by day, as if we were to live for ever, instead of hourly approaching that end here, which is but the commencement of an immortal existence. Selfish, short-sighted human nature labours for the shadow of happiness, not for the substance. It depends for satisfaction on that which of necessity must fail, and hence the disappointment, trouble, vexation, and misery, of which all complain, because all seek, or make no effort to avoid them.”

The candle now gave forth a bright, cheerful light, and the diminutive copper kettle sent forth a volume of curling, hissing steam, spurred to a proud display by the fierce crackling furnace of a whole quarter of a peck of the best Wall's End underneath. The scene, on a small scale, was quite inspiring, and by the time Miss Christina had collected and arranged the tea things in due order upon the table, cut the bread and butter into the veriest shavings, and brewed that beverage, poetically described as possessing refreshing properties, without those of inebriation, any additional luxury must have proved superfluous in the extreme.

Events which appear to be purely accidental are, sometimes as fortuitous as, on the other hand, they occasionally present a very different aspect. Just as the last touch of the pencil was being given to the

picture, and Miss Baxter was drawing the curtain before the window as a final stroke, she brought her hands together with a loud crack, and exclaimed, "I declare if there's not Leonard Woodbee letting himself in at our garden gate!"

With a joyful response Clara rose from her seat, and, hastening to the door, met him on the threshold.

"How glad I am that you are come," said she, giving him both her hands.

"I'll endeavour to believe that, Clara," replied he, smiling, "without an uneasy trial of my faith."

"Pray walk in, dear and respected pupil," observed Miss Christina, somewhat flurried at the unexpected arrival. "There's a chair—permit me—exactly so—next to Clara's, while I sit opposite. Nothing, I should say," continued Miss Baxter, looking as if she had earned applause and deserved

to meet with it, "nothing, I should say, at a small venture of labouring under a great mistake, could be more in union with the feelings of all parties;" and then Miss Baxter began to busy herself among the teacups and saucers with a spirit which threatened to demolish the entire set.

"How is my dear aunt?" asked Clara, turning her eyes with melancholy tenderness upon Leonard.

"Greatly improved," replied he, "and she desired me to give her best love, and say that she hopes to be able to come and see you to-morrow."

"That will, indeed, be a pleasure!" rejoined Clara, but tears flowed down her cheeks notwithstanding; for the thought flashed across her mind that the last time they met, she little dreamt of never again doing so, except as an orphan.

"And permit me to inquire after the

health of —” Miss Christina Baxter was as near as possible adding Bluebeard; but good breeding arrived just in time to the rescue, and she managed to swallow, if not eat, the obnoxious term. With the aid of a slight cough Miss Baxter was safe.

“You would say my father,” returned Leonard. “A more favourable account was given of him this evening,” continued he, “but the fever continued so far unsubdued, that he remains quite unconscious of all that passes around him.”

“Poor gentleman!” exclaimed Miss Christina, for she pitied all who suffered, and would have relieved the pain of an enemy—had she possessed one—at the full cost and charge of her own pains and penalties.

“Is there still great danger?” asked Clara.

“I think not,” replied her cousin,” or at

any rate, no cause exists, Mr. Grimes says, for fear of an immediate change for the worst. I saw him a short time before leaving," continued he, "but he did not know me."

Miss Baxter thought that this want of knowledge was not confined to the present moment, but she kept the reflection to herself.

That time flies fast the poet sings, and never did he appear stronger or fleeter on the wing than at this small tea-party, under the roof of the domicile of Miss Christina Baxter. She did not see, of course, that one of Leonard's hands held a corresponding member belonging to Clara under the table, nor was there any necessity for her observing that when her back was turned, in the act of refilling the teapot, upon two distinct and several occasions, that a strange sound saluted her ears, not unlike the chirp of a

young bird. Miss Baxter knew how deceptive the effects of acoustics were, and that vibrations in the atmospheric regions, caused by vibrations of the sounding body, acting in pulsations, or concentric movements' could never be trusted with any degree of certainty. She therefore paid as little attention as possible to what she heard, and as to seeing, why unless she went to the inconvenience of dropping on her knees or stooping and peeping at considerable trouble, under the table, how was Miss Baxter to discover what was passing in that concealed quarter?

CHAPTER XI.

SUCH a strange piece of mechanism is the forked animal man, so incomprehensible in his tastes, prejudices, likings, and dislikings, that even to himself he must be a marvel and a mystery. As well, or indeed better, might an attempt be made to discover the cause of water finding its own level, a total want of friendship among women, or a donkey's love for thistles, as the search for the hidden whys for his inexplicable wherefores. He is as totally ignorant of them himself as any of his more inquisitive neighbours, who,

as a matter of course, profess to know much more of the secret springs moving the machinery of his actions than he does. They can tell—can those inquisitive neighbours—the ins and outs and roundabouts of everybody and everything; but

“ Great negative ! how vainly would the wise
Inquire, define, distinguish, teach, devise,
Didst thou not stand to point their dull philosophies.”

The old Peninsular had been happy in Paradise, and, unlike his great ancestor Adam, sighed not for an Eve to share his Eden. Satisfied with his early and late vegetables, gratified with the profits and occupation of catching the linnets and such small deer, and contented with the snug little carpet trade, Bill Stumpit could scarcely place his hook upon his breast and say, with truth, that there existed a wish on earth but met with a ready supply to the demand. This, however, referred rather to

the past than the present, for “a change had come o’er the spirit of his dream;” and the old Peninsular felt no longer that absolute contentment which had been both his pride and happiness to enjoy for the long lease of upwards of forty years. But it now seemed, like the longest that was ever yet engrossed on parchment, to be open to the encroachments of time, and if not expired, yet on the eve of expiring.

To his lot, as before has been alleged, without the perfectly smallest fear of contradiction, the old Peninsular was reconciled; but the vegetables became neglected and choked with weeds, the songs of the linnets lost their charm, and as for the carpet business, he positively refused to fulfil several of the most important and profitable orders.

Things could not remain long in this

state, and therefore it is superfluous to say, they did not.

Among the many inhabitants of Hampstead Vale there lived a broker, a man with keen sensibilities concerning the value of goods, chattels, and effects, both moveable and immoveable. To this quick-sighted, quick-scented broker Bill Stumpit repaired one night when the moon was down, and down beyond the probability of an immediate rise, and then and there created no little astonishment in the broker's breast, by offering him in one lot, the stock, crop, and good-will of Paradise Lodge.

"I'll sell 'em all," said the old Peninsular, recklessly, "without reserve."

Caution was one of the most striking characteristics of the broker of Hampstead Vale, and a few succeeding seconds were occupied in satisfying himself, by a close

inspection, that Bill Stumpit was quite sober and completely rational.

There being no outward or visible signs of his condition being otherwise than composed and reasonable, the broker began to entertain the notion of turning a penny by the bargain.

"The furniter," observed the broker by way of 'crabbing' the articles, "is old and rickety."

"But clean and free from bugs," added Bill Stumpit, with a flourish of the bit of British oak.

"Consisting of?" returned the broker prepared to make a mental inventory.

"Three stump bedsteads and a shake down, with sheets, blankets, pillows, bolsters, and rugs to match," replied Bill Stumpit.

"Good," briefly responded the broker of Hampstead Vale, lotting the articles enumerated in his brain.

“Six rush-bottomed chairs, four ditto of wood, a deal table, and a frying pan,” continued the old Peninsular.

“Proceed,” remarked the broker, calculating the intrinsic value of the respective household goods with a rapidity which great practice only could have accomplished.

“A blue washing basin with the willow pattern,” resumed the veteran; “two ditto plain white, and other crockery.”

The broker nodded.

“Fifty-seven bird cages, large, small, and breeding,” continued the old Peninsular, “fourteen linnets, six goldfinches, nine red poles, three hedge sparrows, one tom-tit, and a blackbird.”

“Can give but little for this lot,” said the cautious broker. “I don’t like to buy things that eat.”

“Two saucepans, one gridrion, and a

rolling pin," added the old Peninsular, "as good as new."

"All right," returned the broker.

"A washing tub and a warming pan, pail and flat iron, a clothes horse, and a musket."

The broker was prepared.

"A fancy portrait, in a black ebony frame, gilt, and colored, of His Right Honorable Grace the Duke of Wellington, leading Bonyparte by the nose, with Marshal Blucher a-stirring up the latter with the ramrod of a piece of flying artillery."

"Anything more?" asked the broker of Hampstead Vale.

"A water-butt and a pepper-box, two pewter saltcellars, and a cut-glass mustard-pot."

"Antique or modern?" inquired the broker, looking out of the extreme corners of his eyes.

"Ancient," briefly replied Bill Stumpit.

The broker signified that he was ready to go on with the valuation.

“Half-a-dozen of real German silver teaspoons, one large ditto for gravy, a bottle-jack, dripping-pan, and door mat.”

The broker had them down in his schedule as soon as named.

“There may be a few more odds and ends,” continued the old Peninsular, with prodigal generosity, “but those I’ll throw in.”

“Three-pun-ten,” observed the broker, diving his hands into the pockets of his trousers, and throwing his head on one side, “would be about the marketable value, I should say.”

“Hand over the coin,” rejoined the old Peninsular, “for I’m off at break of day.”

“You’ll be missed in the neighbourhood,” remarked the broker of Hampstead Vale. “What is the cause of this move? Not rent is it?”

“Rent?” repeated Bill Stumpit, as if his honor had been touched, “who says rent? I have paid my rent, Sir, like a Christian, and the Great Mogul was never more punctual. Who says rent?”

“No offence,” replied the broker, finding himself on slippery ground. “I meant no offence, but our business—”

“Is sometimes that of other folks,” added the veteran. “Isn’t that it?”

The broker felt the reproof, and thought it advisable to pay the “three-pun-ten,” without further observation.

The stars were just beginning to fade as the light of day threw a burnished streak of gold across the east, when the old Peninsular issued from the garden gate leading to and from Paradise Lodge. With folded hook and arm he stood contemplating the resolve which he had taken, and hastily put in execution. It was late in life, so quoth

he to his inward self, to turn his back upon the home which had sheltered him so long. He had been used for many a year to look upon it as the last quarters he should occupy until that roll-call was made, which few are prepared to obey, although none can resist.

“Three-pun-ten !” said Bill Stumpit, with a sigh. “I’ve sold the lot, stock and crop, for three-pun-ten ;” and then rubbing hard the tip of his nose with the point of the iron hook, he wheeled upon his bit of British oak, and, shouldering a small bundle, containing his wardrobe, in a blue and white spotted handkerchief, began to employ his powers of locomotion by placing Paradise Lodge gradually in the rear.

CHAPTER XII.

SINCE the night he had had her in his arms—since that night he had borne her insensible form to her chamber, Doctor Starkie had not seen either Alice or her husband, and was totally unconscious of the origin of the scene which presented itself upon the alarm being given.

Like all profoundly cunning men, he thought the game that *he* was playing was far too deep for discovery, and relied upon his own skill alone to achieve the object of his desire. He believed, and almost hoped,

that some violent, ungovernable paroxysm of rage had produced the illness of the one, while terror was the cause of the indisposition of the other. The Oxford double-first prize-man reckoned not that his mask was seen through, or, at least, so suspected of being the hypocrite's, that Alice Woodbee determined to hold no terms with him; but, let the consequences be what they may, to defy all rather than keep the knowledge of his guilty passion from her husband—her husband still.

Upon her place of refuge being discovered, she felt the truth of the threat of her persecutor, that she could not escape from him. She knew that it would be hopeless to struggle in the snare, and therefore pretended to believe that he was honest in his protestations of contrition, in order that she might, through his boasted influence over her husband, obtain a friendly recep-

tion for herself and Leonard, and above all a patient hearing of that which she had to reveal. To return to the roof she had left with no interference to save her from his wrath and wounded pride, shook her woman's heart; but a written promise came pledging his honour to receive them as became a gentleman, and Alice remembered who had wrung it from him. So far, however, her purpose was served, and instead, perhaps, of being forced to submit to some cruel or humiliating indignity, she had no cause whatever to complain of any want of outward kindness, whatever might be more deeply rooted.

Burning to justify herself in the eyes of him who had so deeply wronged her, in the supposition that she had acted merely in perverse defiance of his authority, and groundless complaint of the harsh treatment which Leonard had received at the hands of

Dr. Starkie, Alice put in execution her resolve the earliest moment that the opportunity presented itself.

In the sombre and still hour, which before has been referred to, the injured wife and mother recounted a history of her woes and insults. She told him in words that were evidence of themselves of the truth she uttered, words which spoke of patient suffering, of a soul without guilt, of a bruised and broken spirit ; but one in which no revenge or rankling poison lurked. She told him, and he believed her, that to save their child from a fate far worse than the grave—a living death—the loss of his tottering mind, she had braved the dangers of fleeing from the shelter of his roof to go she knew not where. She told him of the long, long anxious days and sleepless nights she had passed in watching the flickering spark, and what joy the gradual return of

reason had brought to her almost hopeless heart. She told him of the humble home and friends she had met with, of their care and solicitude for Leonard's health and happiness, and, in praising these, held up a mirror before Tobias Woodbee which reflected a picture of his own blind pride, and miserable selfishness.

There could be no secrets now.

Event followed on event. It was now that he learned that the stranger, whom he had slightly heard of as Jacob Giles's lodger, was the heroine of the tale he had so lately told, and that the pretty girl he sometimes met in his rambles, and designated, as he was informed, the Belle of the Village, was the daughter of his successful rival, Lieutenant Somerset. It was now he learned that his wife had denied herself for years every luxury and comfort that he would not miss, to assist her un-

happy sister, and how his increasing thrift—she would not call it by a harsher term—rendered it difficult, at last, to keep her and her child from the pangs of abject poverty. With declining health, he learned that it had been arranged between the sisters that Mrs. Somerset should come and live in seclusion in the neighbourhood of the Oaks, so that they might occasionally be together without giving offence to him.

All this he was told, and more.

In those few, brief minutes the pages of his past life were opened, and there was not one, no, not one, that he could wish to read again. All his plans and schemes were like broken bubbles or crumbled dust. Every one plotted against them, and there he was, as he knew full well, neither loved nor feared.

It was a painful, humiliating truth for Tobias Woodbee. He had never cared for

the good opinion of any one, but that for himself, which he had long entertained with undiminished strength, began to evaporate with a speed which he little anticipated.

“ Fooled, fooled ! ” exclaimed he with bitterness ; and these were the last words he uttered.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE little dark back settlement in the rear of the general shop contained, one evening, when the business of the day was done, two companions of long standing, and union of tastes and sentiments.

“What I shall do when you’re gone,” said Jacob, dolefully, “is more than I can tell.”

“Cheer up, man!” replied the Corporal. “Why you’ll pass your evenings in our bar-parlour, to be sure,” continued he, “and feel as blithe as a bird.”

“Ah!” rejoined Jacob,” but there are other times besides evenings, and I’ve been used to company for all hours of late; and habit is like one’s skin, d’ye see, we get used to it.”

“There’s Bridget,” returned Corporal Crump, with sly humour twinkling in his eyes. “You won’t be left quite alone.”

“Poor Bridget!” exclaimed Jacob Giles. “Her temper was never of the best, and increasing age and deafness seldom act as improvements.”

“But drill and strict discipline,” said Corporal Crump, “work marvellous changes. Think what she is, and what she was.”

“Thanks to your generalship,” added Jacob, “Bridget is certainly better in all respects; but,” and he shook his head despondingly, “I’m afraid there’ll be a relapse.”

“Keep up the drill,” responded the old soldier, “there’s nothing like drill.”

"But we are not all qualified for drilling," returned the little general shopkeeper.

"That's true," said the Corporal, throwing out his chest, and giving it a significant double-knock; "commanders, those who know how to enforce authority with becoming dignity, Jacob, are not to be found as common as bluebottles. Something within is born with them, comrade, which can't be learned like parrots, by mocking."

"That's exactly my opinion," replied Jacob, "and as the something within was not born with me, why Bridget will become mutinous again, I fear."

"Can't allow that," rejoined Corporal Crump. "The articles of war must be obeyed. I shall step in now and then," continued he, "and go through some easy exercises of good manners with her myself. There's nothing like drill."

“ You are a fortunate man, Corporal,” observed the little general shopkeeper, with a slight moan.

“ Well,” ejaculated the old soldier, “ I’ve known some of my comrades unluckier than myself. In a charge at Talavera, there were two cut down right and left of me, and I got off with a bit of a scratch.”

“ I was not alluding to those deeds of fame which must live for all time in song and story,” replied Jacob, with a sudden burst of enthusiasm ; “ but referred particularly to the domestic position which you are about taking up.”

“ You think then, Jacob,” rejoined the veteran, “ that I may be called fortunate in that particular?”

“ As a defender of my country,” returned the little general shopkeeper, “ I could not stand by and see you made a martyr of at the shrine of matrimony. No,” continued

Jacob, "I would long since have warned you of danger, like the pilot fish is supposed to warn the whale, and a small blue bird does the rhinoceros, provided there had been any caution necessary, but—" and then he lowered his voice, "Mistress Twigg is no common widow, she's no man-swallower or—" Jacob paused and looked over both his right and left shoulders to see that nobody was near, "she might have swallowed *me*," he added, throwing himself back in his chair to mark the anticipated startling effect on the nerves of the corporal.

To his chagrin, however, the effect was not so startling as expected.

"Flash in the pan, eh?" said Corporal Crump. "No matter, comrade; clear your touchhole and prime again!"

"No," replied Jacob Giles, "I shall never do that now. It was my first and my last

speculation in that kind o' goods, and I'm only glad that my loss is your gain."

"Spoken like a generous-hearted Briton," rejoined the old soldier, giving Jacob his hand to shake across the table which separated them. "Spoken like a generous-hearted Briton," repeated he.

Scarcely had the sentence been concluded when a strange sound became audible from without, as if some one was perambulating the general shop mounted on stilts.

Both rose from their chairs, with a simultaneous movement for the purpose of making a discovery of the cause of the disturbance, and as Jacob Giles took the precedence of the order of their going, the corporal felt almost electrified at hearing him send forth a screech denoting the most acute pain.

"Thunder and lightning!" ejaculated Corporal Crump. "What is the matter?"

“ Oh! oh! oh!” roared Jacob.

“ Thunder —;” but the exclamation was cut short in the repetition.

“ It’s only I,” cried a well-known voice, for the whistle once heard was not likely to be forgotten. “ Don’t ye know me?”

“ If not his ghost,” said the Corporal, “ that’s Bill Stumpit a-blowing.”

“ To be sure,” replied the old Peninsular. “ I’m your late comrade in rank and file, square and line. But get a candle and let’s see who’s this caught in a trap.”

“ Oh!” hallooed Jacob, “ my foot, my foot. Oh! oh! oh!”

“ I shall swear presently,” returned Corporal Crump, “ I know I shall! What screw is loose with you, Jacob?”

“ I’m lamed for my mortal life,” shouted the little general shopkeeper. “ Oh! oh!”

“ Why if I don’t begin to think,” returned Bill Stumpit, reflectively, “ that I’ve

been pounding my bit of British oak upon my neighbour's toes here. I beg your pardon, friend," continued he, " but let me take it off, for I'm sure it's been there long enough."

" Thank you," replied Jacob, relieved from his painful situation, " I'm exceedingly obliged to you, I'm sure ;" and he limped to his seat in the back settlement with lively impressions of what the rack must have been in the most barbarous of ages.

" Attention !" cried Corporal Crump. " Let every man hold his breath, and listen to the word of command. Stand at ease while I strike a light."

" Stand at ease !" repeated the little general shopkeeper, drawing in his breath between his clenched teeth, " I shall never do that again I know."

Deftly the corporal threw a spark upon a prepared stratum of tinder, and, through the

medium of a brimstone match, ignited the ordinary dip which, throwing its effulgent light like the sun, from a radiated surface, made those opaque objects visible within its reach, which otherwise must have remained concealed.

“And it’s really you,” remarked the Corporal, holding the ordinary dip above his head, and throwing a stronger light by placing a hand between him and the object of his inspection. “It’s really you in your own flesh, bone, and blood, Bill Stumpit, is it?”

“The identical bit of steel,” replied the old Peninsular, and then the two old veterans grappled with hand and hook, and danced a slight jig as an act of publicly celebrating the joy of their meeting.

“What brought you here?” asked the Corporal, cutting a double shuffle.

“My prop of British oak,” replied the

old Peninsular in triumph; "and although worn as fine as a needle at the point, hang me but I'd have ground him to sawdust to the knee but I'd have come!"

"You would, eh?" rejoined Corporal Crump.

"So help me, potatoes!" returned Bill Stumpit, with an expression of religious fanaticism.

"My eyes then behold," said Jacob Giles, still rubbing the injured foot, "that hero of a hundred fights, the ancient Peninsular?"

"What remains of him," rejoined the Corporal, "you now can behold at your leisure, comrade. But when a man becomes a stump," continued he, "or kind of pollard, he requires a wonderful deal of nourishment. Are you thirsty?"

"As a mackerel," replied the old Peninsular, dropping himself into a chair, "and

by the free leave and willing consent of the present company," continued he, "I'll unlimber my bit of British oak, for after a march, I like to stick him in a corner."

"Make yourself at home, celebrated individual," rejoined Jacob, still rubbing his contused foot, "and whatever my homely store affords, you shall be thrice welcome to."

In a remarkably short space of time—considering what was done—Bill Stumpit had his bit of British oak lodged in a corner of the back settlement, and the corporal, from a familiar knowledge of where just to put his hands on things, ornamented the hospitable board with more than was requisite for the improvement of the physical exhaustion of a Prince of the blood royal.

"And now," said Corporal Crump, after duly assisting to moisten what remained of the clay of his old comrade, and seeing that

he was getting in tune for a little examination in chief, "what has brought you here, Bill Stumpit?"

The hero of a hundred fights pointed in silence to the bit of British oak which stood within a few inches of his elbow.

"You don't mean to lead us to suppose that you padded it?" added the Corporal, lifting his eyebrows.

"Every inch of five score miles," replied the old Peninsular, taking his three-cornered felt hat from his bald and polished head and pitching it dexterously over the fork of the bit of British oak.

"But why not ride?" asked Jacob.

"Can't trust myself off the ground," said the old Peninsular, in a mild kind of whistle. "My remainders," continued he, pointing to his one leg, one arm, and one eye, "won't do for cavalry movements."

"This is something to listen to, this is!"

observed Corporal Crump, "and if one's eyes were not used to astonishment they'd begin to smart presently I expect. What the devil has become of Paradise?"

"Sold," replied Bill Stumpit, draining a glass containing a preponderating quantity of brandy to water.

"Sold?" exclaimed the Corporal.

"As I'm a sinner," rejoined the old Peninsular; "in one lot, Dicky," continued he, "stock and crop."

"Have you a strait-waistcoat in this part of the country?" asked Corporal Crump, addressing the little general shopkeeper. "For it's my opinion we shall want one presently."

"Give me a few minutes' breathing time," said Bill Stumpit, tapping his breast with his hook, "and I'll clear myself of all them suspicions."

"Take your own time, celebrated indivi-

dual," observed Jacob Giles, "and recollect that undue haste often leads to dull delay."

"A very good check for a fast man that is, Richard Crump," returned the old Peninsular, chidingly. "I should advise you to mix them words, Sir, with your tobacco, and smoke 'em gently. Howsomdever," continued he, "I'll make short work of my story, for although it may take longer than the knife-grinder who had none to tell, it won't tire ye from its length."

"We shall be the best judges of that," remarked the Corporal. "Make ready, present, and let drive at 'em!"

"I'd rather be shot out an' out," began Bill Stumpit, "or hanged, if it must come to the worst, than be in water just hot enough to keep one's feelings always in a state of slow simmer. It's dreadful, comrade," continued he, turning to Jacob, "to be eternally stewing. I know what a

variety of pains are, besides chopping and lopping, but, if my opinion's worth anything, nothing comes up to the day-an'-night state of a slow simmer."

Jacob Giles intimated an entire concurrence, but expressed it silently.

"From the moment," resumed the old Peninsular, "I yielded up my charge—that precious charge, Dicky, you ordered me to guard like the apple of my only eye—to that undertaker-looking chap who came for them in a yeller po' chay; I say, from that very moment to this I've been in the stew-pot over a slow, charcoal fire. It wasn't to be borne any longer, and after deliberating upon the measure of cooling myself in the water-butt, with my head downwards, I concluded it would be wiser to surrender myself and stand my trial. Here I am," said Bill Stumpit, extending his hook and arm, "ready to be shot, hanged, trans-

ported, or flogged, according to the judgment of this right honorable court."

"What does the old figger head mean?" remarked Corporal Crump. "I still think we shall want that waistcoat, Jacob."

"Ought not I to have held out as long as I could, fortified as we were," rejoined the old Peninsular, "with bastions and breastworks?"

"What, stood a siege?" said the Corporal.

"Ay," returned Bill Stumpit, "wasn't that my dooty?"

"Not as the surrender was desired," replied Corporal Crump, "by the garrison itself."

"And that's the judgment of this right honorable court?" exclaimed the old Peninsular. "Hoo-ray! I haven't made a forced march of a hundred miles for nothing."

"Refresh yourself, hero," urged Jacob

Giles, "by a further supply of brandy-and-water,"

"May good fortune attend the liberal!" returned Bill Stumpit, refilling his glass. "And now," continued he, "you've got the foundation of the business which brought me so far, I'll go on until we come to the roofing the matter in. Being as restless as a parch-pea on a drum head, I made up my mind, with quick's the word, and sharp's the movement, to see a little bit more of the world before leaving it; and plucking myself out by the roots from Paradise, I started to find a new home among"—Bill Stumpit paused with dramatic effect before giving the tag—"old friends."

"And you need not stir an inch, hero," replied Jacob, "for here it is beyond all doubt or question. I can't exactly take my rank among your old friends at present; but if you'll stay long enough with me, it

shall go hard but I'll try to mellow into one."

"Never say no to a good offer, Bill," rejoined the Corporal. "It's one which I can answer for, that may be set down, at a long figure, in the shape of a heavy premium."

"Halt for a moment," returned the old Peninsular. "I'm not a likely son of a woman to kick myself out of a feather bed, Dicky, as you know full well from a long acquaintanceship; but let me put the thatch on what I've got to say."

"Hear, hear," cried Jacob Giles. "A clear stage and a fair hearing is an Englishman's birthright. Proceed, hero of a hundred fights."

"I've kept the tit bit, like a child with a jam tart," continued the old Peninsular; "but the truth is, Dicky, that I dreamt so much of the Mrs. Corporal that is to be, that at last she sat upon my buzzim, as soon

as I got to sleep, and such was the weight of the nightmare, that hang me if I didn't begin to get as flat as a pancake."

"Mrs. Corporal sitting on your *boozum*, Bill Stumpit!" ejaculated the veteran, with an expression amounting almost to serious displeasure. "How came you to dream such a thing as that, Sir?"

"You wouldn't call the hero to account for dreaming, would ye?" returned Jacob.

"Not as a rule, perhaps," replied Corporal Crump; "but a soldier's honor," continued he, with a martial frown, "is easily touched."

"Well!" exclaimed the old Peninsular, scratching the top of his polished head with his iron hook, "right or wrong there she squatted, Dicky, and to shake her off was beyond *my* strength. Being a weight more than I could bear constantly, I thought it better to try what a change of quarters might do, and this was another and last

reason for turning my back on Paradise Lodge."

"Mistress Twigg, hero," observed the little general shopkeeper, "is a magnificent specimen of a female, and so you'll say when you see her."

"I'd a great mind to pay her a visit before coming here," rejoined Bill Stumpit; "but seeing your name over the shop front, licensed dealer in coffee, tea, tobacco, and snuff, and finding the door ajar, I couldn't pass it."

"You want to see Charlotte. do ye?" said the Corporal, with his brow now clear from the martial frown.

"I do, Dicky," replied the old Peninsular, "and shall look upon her as worth the distance of coming to inspect on my bit of British oak."

"Then limber up," replied Corporal Crump, "we'll pass our evening in the bar-parlour of the Harrow and Pitchfork."

CHAPTER XIV.

LEONARD was away, perhaps on a mission to Miss Baxter, and the solitary occupier of the large and gloomy room in which she sat was Alice Woodbee. Her features, blanched and delicate, were fixed with an expression of the deepest sorrow, and her heart seemed charged to overflowing with unutterable grief.

Alone, and in secret, she mourned for her who was now the tenant of the tomb.

Dark, heavy curtains were drawn before the French windows, opening upon an

Elizabethan flower garden, where Alice had passed many an hour in days gone by; but between the folds of the drapery, opposite the casement, and commanding the closest view of her, the indistinct outline of a man's face was visible, closely pressed against the glass.

Long as it continued to be there, she did not perceive that she was under the scrutinizing gaze of any one, and the harsh creak of the fastening of the window, as it was gently turned by a careful hand, failed to attract her attention.

The current of air, however, sweeping into the room nearly extinguished the lamp, which stood upon the table between the window and Alice, and for a few moments screened the intruder's approach.

"Who is there?" cried she, starting from her chair.

The flickering flame, after flaring in the

wind, became steady again, and there stood Doctor Starkie with the parenthesis as of yore.

“Be not alarmed, my good Madam,” said the Oxford double-first prize-man in as silky a voice as ever man spoke. “Be not alarmed,” repeated he. “It is only I, your humble and, he feign would hope, unoffending servant,” and Doctor Starkie bowed as became a courtier and a gentleman.

“Are you aware, Sir, that this is a rude and unwarrantable encroachment upon my privacy?” rejoined Alice, with dignity.

“Pardon me I beseech you,” returned the Doctor, placing his hands together; “but it is long since we have met, and moments like these are too precious to be lost.”

“I do not understand you, Sir,” said Alice as she stood regarding him with feelings of inexpressible dread.

“Do not speak to me thus,” replied

Doctor Starkie in the same supplicating tone. "I would not offend you for the hope of heaven."

"I can hold no communication with you, Sir, and must beg that you will leave this room immediately."

Her eyes flashed with indignation as she spoke, but he quailed not under them.

"Forgive me if I hesitate to obey your mandate," he returned, drawing himself up to his full height, and bending his gaze upon her with a rude and steady stare. "I came not here to be dismissed."

Alice's bosom heaved convulsively, and her upper lip curled with contempt as she moved in silence towards the door.

In a moment one of her hands was in his, and the firm grasp caused an involuntary exclamation of pain.

"Stay," said he, in a voice hoarse with emotion, "we part not so."

“ Unhand me,” cried Alice, trying to wrench herself from his hold. “ Unhand me!” repeated she, raising her voice.

“ There is no one within hearing,” coolly returned Doctor Starkie, “ or I should not have chosen this hour for seeking you.”

“ And what would you with me, Sir? ” ejaculated she.

“ Be patient,” replied the Oxford double-first prize-man, placing himself between the door and Alice, “ and you shall hear.”

He released her hand now.

“ I suspect,” resumed he, while his features became deeply lined, “ that we do not understand each other. Why have you avoided me of late? ”

“ Because your presence is hateful to me,” was the answer.

“ Indeed!” he rejoined.

“ Because,” she continued, “ I knew that your cold, calculating, cruel heart assumed

a virtue which it never had, and could never feel, and, wicked in itself, would remain so."

"Indeed!" again rejoined Doctor Starkie, and his face betokened passions difficult to suppress.

"You thought to play again the demon's part," said Alice, with eyes that spoke of a spirit roused to little short of frenzy. "Discovering that your devilish end," continued she, "was not to be gained by —"

"Stay, stay," interrupted he, in a husky tone. "Put no construction upon my actions. If you know the object of them, so do I."

"To your infamy be it spoken."

"Perhaps so," returned the Doctor; "but we will not discuss so unimportant a point. May I ask if your husband was made sensible of this display of virtuous indignation?" added he, with a sneer.

"The disclosure of your perfidy —"

“Produced an unexpected effect,” interrupted he. “Exactly so. Paralysis is not unfrequently the result of a sudden disarrangement of the nervous system,” and Doctor Starkie, although white as the ceiling above him, spoke as calmly as if an ordinary topic was engaging his attention.

“And now, Sir, let me pass,” said Alice.

“One moment more,” replied he. “I need not ask whether you were believed;—that is evident in what followed. But as none but the mad act without motives—and I question whether even they do so without real or imaginary ones—what might have been yours in keeping me in ignorance of this confession to your husband? You could not wish that we should meet again;—blood is a sickening sight in a woman’s eyes.”

“There was little fear of any being shed,” rejoined she, with a proud demeanour

he had never seen before. "Putting the heel upon a worm crushes the insect; but it provokes no feelings of murder."

The Oxford double-first prize-man's teeth grated, and his eyes darted forth a light as if his brain was on fire.

"But why should I render any explanation to you?" said Alice. "Have I anything to hope from you—anything to fear? If I told you nothing, it was simply my contempt that kept me silent."

Doctor Starkie was not prepared for this, and he shrank within himself.

"He," she continued, pointing in the direction of the sick man's chamber, "was your dupe, and dismissal from his service might have come, perhaps, from him with a serviceable lesson. At least so I thought, and my fervent hope was—if it had pleased Heaven to restore his health—that we might never exchange another word."

“My own weapons turned against myself, eh?” rejoined the Doctor, with a laugh expressive of the minutest measure of merriment. “A woman for plotting against the devil; but I’ll not be beaten if the gibbet is my doom!” and thus speaking, he seized her by her arms and pinioned them to her side.

A wild, loud shriek rang piercingly through the house.

“Peace,” hissed he; and his hot breath steamed upon her cheek, “or I’ll dash you to my foot.”

“Mercy,” exclaimed Alice, “have mercy upon me!” and she thrust herself back as if from the deadly fangs of a serpent.

But in spite of her strong struggles he held her to his breast, fast locked, and clutched in the gripe of one terribly resolved.

“What shall save you, now?” cried he in triumph; but scarcely was the last word

upon his lip when a figure—as if newly raised from the dead—stood before him.

Doctor Starkie's arms dropped, and in a moment he was stricken to the ground by a blow which might have felled an ox.

CHAPTER XV.

AMONG the great gifts and innate self-possession of that old soldier, Corporal Crump, was the facility of his not only rendering himself at home upon all the ordinary occasions of life, but to speak in a figurative sense, he possessed a corresponding ease of taking in a lodger.

With a full-length pipe in his mouth, the bit of British oak resting on a neighbouring chair, his hook and arm crossed upon that breast which had braved the battle and the breeze of consecutive campaigns and seasons,

the three-cornered felt hat placed with a jaunty air over the snuffed-out optic, and a bright, sparkling, diamond surface in the one remaining, Bill Stumpit looked as much at ease as if the possession of the bar-parlour of the Harrow and Pitchfork belonged to him by legal and indisputable right.

Mistress Twigg either expected company or she did not—that was a fact, great or little, locked within the casket of her secrets—but no one, of the most sceptical turn of mind, could doubt that she was got up on the present occasion with more than care, and a total disregard of expense.

Never did Mistress Twigg appear to greater advantage than on the evening of the old Peninsular's introduction to the Harrow and Pitchfork. Her cap was of the newest fashion, and the ribands of the brightest hue. The richness of her dress declared itself in the rustle of its stiff and liberal widths, and

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the kerchief, folded with scrupulous care across her extensive bosom, had more delicate flowers, fruit, leaves, figures of fantastic shapes, curves, angles, and tangents, worked in, around, and about it, than fell to the share of a common piece of muslin. In addition to this splendour, Mistress Twigg wore, by way of ornament more than utility, a gigantic watch by her side, to the chain of which so large a collection of seals, keys, rings, and cornelian hearts, was attached, that it seemed to be the gathering of many generations.

As may easily be supposed, the old Peninsular was perfectly dazzled with the effect produced by the bride expectant, and he remained, in the position already described, with his solitary eye fixed upon her in mute admiration.

Corporal Crump never felt prouder, or perhaps so proud of his Charlotte, as he did

on the present occasion, and was far from being an indifferent observer of the great hit she had made on the sensibilities of what remained of Bill Stumpit.

It will be better to pass over, with as short an annotation as possible, the state of the feelings of Jacob Giles, as he sat in the remotest corner of the bar-parlour slowly eating a thumb-nail. If prone to the envy of another, he did his best to keep them down.

“I have always been from my youth upwards,” observed Mistress Twigg, without raising her eyes from her knitting needles, which she was plying with the spirit of industry, “a great admirer of the military, and I can say, without the smallest intention to flatter, that of the many gallant spirits I may have wished to have seen, from hearing and reading of their noble deeds of glory, there is not one—” Charlotte coughed as if on

the eve of committing a small error—"or *but* one," continued she, bestowing upon the corporal a look of no ordinary tenderness, "that I desired to make his personal acquaintance so much as yours, Peninsular."

The old Peninsular, as in duty bound—for a fairer compliment could scarcely be paid to merit—took off the three-cornered felt hat, and, raising his hook to his brow, saluted the widow as became a soldier.

Just at this critical moment the calls of business demanded the presence of Mistress Twigg at the bar.

Upon her departure, Bill Stumpit took the full-length pipe from his lips, and pushing his bit of British oak most unexpectedly forwards, caught Corporal Crump in about the middle of his abdomen, and delivered a monosyllable, or sound, which can only be described in something of the form of Welch orthography, "Klek!"

The corporal emitted a short expression of uneasy surprise, and covered the quarter attacked with the palms of both hands.

“What’s the old figure-head about now, I should like to know?” said he, with an effort to knit his brows and look serious; but it proved an eminent failure.

“What have *you* been about, Dicky,” replied the old Peninsular, in a whisper, and threatening to renew the attack, “to deserve such a prize as that?” and he pointed over his shoulder in the direction which the widow had taken.

“She’s a fine woman,” observed the little general shopkeeper, in a confidential tone, and he struggled to prevent the rise of some effervescing jealousy, “a remarkable fine woman.”

“A field-marshal of a woman!” returned Bill Stumpit. “She’s what *I* should call a

field-marshal of a female!" continued he, looking hard at the corporal.

Corporal Crump threw out his chest, for it slightly swelled at these words.

"You're a fortunate fellow, Dicky," resumed the old Peninsular. "To have had all the shot and shell poured at ye as you have done, and then to live to call such a wife as that your own. Talk of miracles!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Corporal, "there's no knowing what end we may come to. We may have dangers, misfortunes, and afflictions raining upon and around us, as thick as the shot and shell you speak of, Bill Stumpit, and some may, now and then, hit as particularly hard; but if a man has only the real metal in him," and Corporal Crump held his head well over his cravat, "if he has a spine of the true whalebone, it may bend now and then, but it will never break."

“That’s the spirit of a true-born Englishman!” returned Jacob Giles, rousing himself from the dull occupation of rubbing his thumb-nail.

“To be sure it is,” said the Corporal, “and so long as such a spirit can be found, there will always be a very queer breed to beat. Bonaparte was right enough when he said Englishmen never seemed to know when they were beaten; but he might have added, because they don’t understand what it is. Repulsed they have been, and will again, but beaten—never.”

“We’ve seen ’em stand like a wall of fire, before now, haven’t we, Dicky?” remarked the old Peninsular, “with the round, grape, and canister ploughing ’em up by whole battalions; but as one man was knocked over, or fifty, their places were taken as soon as vacant.”

“And whether in war or peace,” replied

Corporal Crump, "that's the stuff that's wanted. If a broken rank, or a vacant chair, could not be occupied again with the right sort of material, and equal to what was there before, the decline and fall of old England must have taken place some few centuries ago. Occasions make heroes, but we can't have heroes without *men*."

"He talks like a book," observed Jacob Giles; "I could listen to him for a week at a stretch."

"You're not surprised, then, that he took the field-marshal captive?" said Bill Stumpit.

"Not in the smallest particular," replied the little general shopkeeper; "and she's as worthy a prize as the captor is of winning her."

"Handsomely spoken," rejoined the Corporal. "Jacob, your health," and he lifted

a flagon of the widow's own to his lips, and pledged the toast in a draught which, from its depth, proved that he was no stranger to the mixture.

“As you say, Dicky,” returned the old Peninsular, “there's no foretelling what a man's end may be. Only think of your coming to be a licensed victualler ; there's promotion !”

“But it's easy to see what a cur's end will be, Bill Stumpit,” added Corporal Crump. “A man can die bnt once,” continued he, “and that he knows and feels, and if he has done his duty to the best of his powers and ability, he looks at death with a calm eye, but not callous heart. If from prosperity he has fallen into the worst of all earthly ills, the hard gripe of poverty, and so lost his best and dearest friends, those who once hung upon his breath, he will not burn with revenge or

hatred, and turn his back upon the world, but, putting his shoulder to the wheel, laugh at the cold looks and heads turned aside, and strive, with hopeful strength, to stem the current. It is child's work to float with the stream; straws and rushes can do that; but 'tis the hour of trial which shows the man, and he who gives it a bold front, is worthy of the name."

"Good," rejoined the little general shopkeeper, leaning forward to catch each syllable of the corporal's powerful oratory.

"With such metal," continued he, "no one can say what a Christian may come to; for like a cork he is difficult to keep down, and considering the many changes and chances of life, there's a reasonable probability of his laying himself up in lavender at last. But with a cur, comrades, it's a very different matter. There's no occasion

to call in a special prophet to foretel the way in which *he'll* wind up the thread of life. At the early glimpse of the enemy—I don't care in what shape it comes—his first thought will be to run away, or sit down and weep. A nearer approach makes him either bolt or faint, and after that he thinks of drowning or hanging himself. Provided he should not carry out one of these doglike modes of ending his fears, he shoves his head into the slough of despair, and then the public walks over the cur who buried himself in the mud. And that's the style of *his* finish."

Mistress Twigg here made her re-appearance, and intimated that James Burly would form an addition to the society in the bar-parlour, provided it was agreeable to all parties.

It being unanimously agreed that nothing could be more pleasant to the respective

feelings of every one present, the knight of the muscles came forward, and with a countenance expressive of something more than usual being uppermost in his brain, rather startled the collective body by exclaiming in a strong, healthy tone, "Thank Heaven!"

"By all means," responded Corporal Crump.

"I say, widder, and gentlemen generally," returned Burly James, making a bow of ceremony, "thank Heaven!"

"I see," observed Mistress Twigg; "I can see through Mr. Burly at all times, and if he hasn't a peculiar reason for that thanksgiving at this moment, an extensive deception has been practised upon me."

"The widder's right," rejoined he, "I have a motive for my prayers, and always had, but never a more particular one than now. Gentlemen," continued James Burly, making a short examination of the physiog-

mony of each one present, "widder included, thank Him from whom all blessin's flow!"

"I thought so," returned the hostess, "I expected as much; but we must not hurry Mr. Burly," continued she, shaking her head. "He requires time to bring forth anything, like my remarkable Polish hen, that lays a diurnal egg throughout the year."

"Right again," exclaimed the knight of the muscles. "The widder's right again, gentlemen. I'm not a meteor; but let me have a few moments for my i-deas to soak, and, if slow, you'll find 'em remarkably sure."

"Take a chair, Sir," said the old Peninsular, removing his bit of British oak from that which it occupied and pushing it towards Burly James.

"Thanks be to you, veteran; for I see

you're that," replied James Burly, "although a stranger. A man's i-deas I think," continued he, dropping himself into a seat by the side of Bill Stumpit, "flow better when sitting than standing."

The hostess of the Harrow and Pitchfork raised a finger as if to enjoin a strict silence, for there was a presentiment in her mind that the knight of the muscles was the bearer of more than common intelligence.

"As a stranger," said he, addressing the old Peninsular, and offering the developed biceps of his formidable right arm, "do me the kindness to feel o' that."

Bill Stumpit acceded to the request through the agency of his hook, and, signifying his opinion that iron was not harder, Burly James assumed a look of combined pride and enlarged satisfaction.

Mistress Twigg again lifted the finger, and glancing down the sides of her nose,

with her head at an angle to produce the elevation of the chin, appeared to silently order James Burly to keep her no longer in suspense.

“I’m gettin’ ripe, widder,” said he, perceiving that greater delay might produce a more decided expression of impatience, “and shall drop presently like a meller pear. Who do you think’s an outside passenger by his Majesty’s four-oss mail to night?”

To consume time in guessing would be ridiculous, and therefore Mistress Twigg begged that Mr. Burly would waive the necessity of an answer.

“The bookman,” cried he in an excited state, “Master Leonard’s nateral-born tormentor.”

“What, Doctor —”

“The same, widder,” interrupted the knight of the muscles, “and with a mark

upon his knob likely to last between now and Christmas. I've seen many a swellin,' but that was a swelliner!"

"Wounded by accident or intention?" inquired the Corporal.

"I should say," replied James Burly, "that a better intention was never brought into force by a scientific upper cut."

"Pray cease wandering from the point," observed Mistress Twigg with an approach to vehemence. "You have got it now; pray stick to it."

Mr. Burly felt that the correction was not altogether unmerited.

"I will, widder," responded he; "I'll hammer away at it in a way that shall please the public, and so here goes. About an hour after dark this evening, we servants were havin' a little amusin' talk in the servants' hall about everybody's business, our own included, when such a screech as

sounded dreadful to our ears, made us fly like so many rabbits in a warren when a double-barrel is pulled at 'em behind a hedge close by. Some scoured one way, some another; but I went straight to where the screech was still keepin' it up as strong as ever. Missis's door of what's called her private room was open; in I went without knockin', and there a sight met my eyes which I shan't forget in a hurry."

All his hearers appeared to be interested in the relation, but both Mistress Twigg and Jacob were breathless with the intensity of their emotions.

"I say," continued Mr. Burly, looking singly at each individual composing the circle, "that a sight met my eyes which I shan't forget in a hurry. There stood master, just as he got out of bed—I don't enter into particulars from feelings of delicacy to the female sex," and he touched his

forehead with a respectful gesture towards the position occupied by the hostess—"but there he stood with as few clothes on as he well could have, whiter than chalk, and his eyes—oh, my eyes, what eyes!" and the knight of the muscles threw his own to the ceiling above him as the reminiscence of the expression presented itself.

"In his hand, I forget which," resumed he, "he held a poker bent almost double, and at his feet—I needn't say on the floor—laid Doctor Starkie stretched as stiff as a maggot."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mistress Twigg.

"A rosy stream," said Burly James, "poured down his nose, and he looked, altogether, knocked out o' time."

"Not killed?" ejaculated Jacob, worked to the highest pitch which curiosity could attain.

"Wait-a-bit," replied James Burly, "and

you shall hear every partickler. On a chair, with her hair hanging down her back, sat my poor missis, a-giving tongue as only a woman can when she's hurt or frightened. She laughed, and cried, and hollared all at once, and seemed to me to have gone clean, stark crazy.

“I'm not a meteor, as I said before, and for a few seconds my i-deas felt to want a little soakin'. I could do nothin' more than stare as if my eyes were stuck open with skewers.

“ ‘Take either him or me away,’ said my master, in a nasty kind of voice, and pointing to the body of the bookman with the poker, ‘or I shall add murder to my sins,’ and with this he gave a kind of reel, and would have dropped had I not caught him.

“It was but a feather weight—for of all the shrunk-into-nothings I ever saw, master's the most so—and whipping him up across

my shoulders, I carried him off to the room where he came from, and dropped him lightly on the bed.

“Missis follered, how I don’t know, but there she was, and, as luck would have it, ’pothecary Grimes dropped in at the very nick of that very moment, and no sooner put his eyes upon master’s face, and a hand upon his heart, than, without speaking a word, he stuck a lancet into both his arms.

“I now thought of the bookman, and runnin’ back to where we left him, I found that individooal crawled under the table, surrounded by my fellow-servants.

“‘How are ye, Sir?’ said I, droppin’ on my knees to have a squint at him.

“Bookman groaned.

“‘Can I assist ye, Sir?’

“Bookman groaned worse than ever.

“‘Are you hurt, Sir?’

“ ‘ Hurt,’ replied he, so that I could just hear what he said, ‘ I’m brained.’

“ ‘ Better come out, Sir, and let’s see what’s best to be done.’

“ ‘ Where’s that—that madman?’ said he.

“ ‘ In bed, without sense or motion.’

“ ‘ You’re sure o’ that?’

“ ‘ As I’m a wicked sinner, but not a miserable one, Sir,’ said I.

“ ‘ Then let every one go but you, Burly.’

“ Being left to ourselves, out bookman crept, and a pretty picture he looked, take my word for it. Whether most frightened or hurt I can’t tell; but such a mawled cocoa-nut I haven’t seen for many a day.

“ ‘ Gettin’ some water, I sponged him up a little fresh, and then asked how it came to happen that he caught such an ugly wipe.

“ ‘ The madman rushed in,’ said he, ‘ and cut me down in an instant.’

“‘A sort of fit came over him, I suppose, Sir?’”

“‘Yes, Burly, but such a fit that I won’t run the risk of meetin’ with a second one. The mail will pass the end of the drive in about half an hour?’”

“‘That’s it’s time, Sir,’ replied I.

“‘Then go with me to my room,’ said bookman, ‘for I won’t be left alone while here. I’ll quit this place for ever, and that too, immediately.’”

“Faint and weak as he was, his movements could scarcely be quicker, and some time before Jonathan tooled up to the lodge gate, there were we, luggage and all, a-waitin’ to be taken up. Givin’ me his blessin’ for my trouble, bookman climbed into the box-seat, and that’s the last, I expect, that I shall see of him in this world, and,” continued Burly James with unquestionable sincerity, “I shan’t grieve

if we don't meet in the next, gentlemen, widder included, thank Heaven!"

"Really," exclaimed Mistress Twigg, at the conclusion of the knight of the muscles' narrative, "I never heard of a more thrilling coincidence in the whole course of my life."

"I began to think the unfortunate man was slain," observed Jacob, in a state which can only be described as reeking from excitement.

"It would not have proved a casualty among the list killed, but what *I* could have borne with considerable submission," said the Corporal.

"I don't think, speaking for myself," remarked Mr. Burly, "that *my* appetite would have failed; but I'm just as well pleased that he's taken himself off without giving us the trouble of buryin' him."

“But what could have brought Mr. Woodbee, ill as he was, into that room to assault the tutor?” inquired Mistress Twigg, with her eyebrows raised far above their natural boundaries.

“I can’t answer that question,” replied Burly James, shaking his head, “for the bookman himself didn’t seem to know. I’ve told you, widder, all I saw, heard, and did.”

“No doubt of that,” replied the hostess. “I have not the smallest doubt of that, Sir,” continued she. “My customers—those of the bar-parlour—are in the constant habit of treating me with the greatest confidence; but promiscuous discussion sometimes unveils a mystery.”

“You’ll excuse me, widder,” rejoined James Burly, “if I leave the unveilin’ the mystery to your three selves then, for

after a drop o' the right sort I must be gone."

And after "the drop," in the shape of an honest quart, the knight of the muscles vanished.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN the lone, dark hours of the night, when not a sound broke upon her ear, save the low moan of him who lay paralysed by her side, Alice Woodbee kept her solitary watch. She seldom left him, but with ready hand administered to every trifling want that might mitigate his sufferings. To smooth his pillow, to cool his hot and burning brow, to moisten his parched lips, and fan the cheek which looked little less red than blood, were acts which Tobias Woodbee appeared sensible of, but unable to acknowledge, except by the thankfulness which as

often beamed in his glassy eyes as she bent over him.

They told her that probably he would live; but to what extent the nervous system might remain unhinged, it was yet impossible to say. He had not uttered a word from the time of his being borne to that bed, from which he rose to inflict the apt retribution upon his subtle enemy, and days and weeks had passed since then. Often, however, would he start as if from a confused dream of the past, and vainly trying to raise himself in the bed, the blue veins swelled upon his forehead, and clenching his teeth, he seemed to be once more an actor in that dread scene of violence.

It was then that Alice rested her cheek upon his, and bathing it with her tears, the paroxysm passed, and he fell into a dull heavy stupor, which lasted, frequently for hours.

So day succeeded night, and night the day, with little change.

The morning light began to steal through chink and crevice, and peep between curtain and blind, and dart through the lattice, and to master many a wily device to keep his bright ray out. As it glanced upon her wing, the lark shook the dew-drop from it, and the wood-pigeon flapped from the roost in the fir. Rook called to rook, and the chattering sable colony spoke, perhaps, like other families, of dreams and visions of the night "begotten of vain fantasy." From the eaves of the thatch it awoke slumbering sparrows to chirp and twitter from twig to spray, and mob the blinking owl to his home in the old oak tree.

"Alice!"

She could not be deceived; that was her husband's voice.

"Alice," repeated he, in a tone scarcely

audible from its feebleness, "I know you are by me—you are always so."

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed she, "you can then speak again?"

"Yes," replied he, "and let my first words be grateful ones to her I owe so much. O Alice, Alice! how shall I ever repay you—how make amends for all your forgiving kindness?"

"Hush!" she rejoined, stooping over him, and pressing a kiss upon his brow, "not another syllable of that. We'll speak of other things: of strength, of health, of happier days."

"Draw back the curtains," returned he, "and throw the casement open, Alice. I wish to see the sunshine once again, and feel the fresh air play upon my face."

"Dare I do so?"

"Yes, yes; I'm sure it will not hurt me."

Conforming to his desire, with somewhat a reluctant hand, Alice withdrew the heavy drapery hanging round the bed, and throwing open the window, the breeze swept into the sick man's room, fragrant with the breath of flowers which it had rifled on its way.

"It feels and looks like heaven, Alice," said he, "and time, to me, never came on so soft a pinion as the present. Where is Leonard?"

"In bed and sleeping, I trust."

"He will never shine in the senate, Alice," added the invalid, with a faint smile playing upon his ghastly features; "but he shall teach me how to employ my future hours to make atonement for the past. You will assist him, Alice, will you not?"

Ay, that she would, and she answered by her tears, which stole in silence down her cheeks.

"There is much to do, if each be well

employed to the last allotted of my life," continued he; "for time misspent, how is it to be recalled? I know all now, Alice. I know what my blind selfishness, my over-reaching pride, and empty vanity would have clutched;—the shadow of happiness but not its substance. It has been said, that if we could see ourselves as others see us, how differently should we esteem ourselves. I think, Alice, that that mirror, in which my reflection may have been viewed by all, save myself, is now held up to me. It is terrible to look upon—a distorted, frightful picture; but one that I will gaze on daily, so long as life remains."

His voice became stronger as he spoke, and a crimson flush spread over his countenance. "One word, and but one," continued he, with a strangely altered tone, "of him we'll never name again. Where is he,

or what became of the—" but the intensity of the feeling choked the sentence.

"I know what you would say," returned Alice, hastily. "Be contented by learning all that I know, or is known of him, in the simple words:—he is gone."

Tobias Woodbee breathed hard for a few moments, and his lips were compressed together; but he said nothing in reply.

"Tell me then—" but his eyes rested at this moment upon the black dress of his wife, and again he could say no more.

There was a pause, and her fast-falling tears told him what he would have asked.

"Clara is an orphan?"

Alas! it was too true.

"To us then she shall be as our own," continued he. "Is she here?"

"No," returned Alice. "Yielding to Miss Baxter's entreaty I assented to her remain-

ing at her house until your wishes were learned respecting her."

"Let both be sent for this morning," said Tobias Woodbee. "I have much to say to them, and to Miss Baxter especially. Had I, Alice, listened to her,—had I turned a willing ear to the warning she once gave me, how much suffering might have been saved to all! But that is too late, too late to think of now. Let me rather employ my time for future good, than vainly regretting what can never be repaired."

The delicate and tender green of the beech, the ash with its young silken leaves, and the yellow and crimson tints of the oak, proclaimed that it was that season of the year when spring is just merging into summer. The stichwort, and lychness, and the anemone, were in bloom, and beautiful

wild flowers dotted every hedgerow, bank, and sunny nook.

Propped by pillows in an invalid chair, blanched in feature and attenuated in form, reclined Tobias Woodbee. Slowly and carefully, and where the path was smoothest, Leonard drew his father with a gentle tread, and, every now and then, turned anxiously to see that the motion caused no pain.

By each side of the chair walked Alice and Clara, and the hands of the invalid were clasped in theirs.

With a look so different to that of bygone days—a look of reliance and trust, of a bruised if not broken spirit, Tobias Woodbee turned occasionally to his attendants with the helpless dependence of a little child.

As they slowly advanced down an avenue of lime trees, on the foliage of which the wild bees hummed and clustered, he

beckoned for his wife to stoop towards him.

“Leonard will never shine in the senate, Alice,” whispered he; and with the same smile with which he before made the observation; “but if not great, I think he will be happy,” and, thus speaking, he raised a hand and pointed significantly to Clara.

“We will hope so,” she replied, and there was a joyousness in the tone leaving little doubt that the hope was well founded.

CHAPTER XVII.

DOCTOR GRIMES had taken the nicest care to insure himself against one of those visitations popularly known as the discourse Caudle, and in the conscientious belief that every art had been used to allay the chronic irritability of his stiff-backed, stiff-tempered, but pliant-tongued partner, he jumped into bed, and, to perpetrate a jingling of words, covered up his head.

Mrs. Doctor's purpose, however, was not to be frustrated by such an impotent manœuvre, and it somewhat tended to apply

a spark to the train of her fiery indignation that such a consummate piece of transparent evasion should be attempted upon her.

“ Mr. Grimes,” cried she in the shrill, piping tone of exasperated virtue, “ am I to believe my senses, or do I labor under some profound and mysterious hallucination?”

“ I am not aware, Margaret —”

“ You never are, Sir,” interrupted she. “ By some unaccountable but rigid rule by which your domestic conduct is governed, you never *are* aware of those onerous duties which befit the character of the husband.”

“ My dear Margaret —”

“ Those terms of assumed affection, Sir, are disagreeable to me, and, consequently, by no means pleasant. You will be kind enough—to oblige *me*,” said Mrs. Doctor,

with emphasis, "to make a decided alteration in them with as little consumption of time as possible."

The apothecary's nose was, by this time, well clear of the bed clothes, and he forthwith called in aid all that stock of resignation which he, providentially, kept on hand for instant use, or as the emergency might demand.

"I thought, Margaret —"

"Oh bother!" ejaculated Mrs. Doctor, "I hate people to think. Thought possesses no pleasure to me, Sir."

The apothecary would have sighed, but deeming it a more judicious course to suppress the effect of a discontented spirit, he strangled the sound in its birth, and put this question in strict confidence, as he believed, to himself. What can be the crime that I have committed to be thus soused head over ears in purgatory?

“What’s that your’e mumbling?” asked Mrs. Doctor.

“Margaret,” replied the apothecary with a deferential tone, “I am not mumbling.”

“Then we are at issue, Sir, that’s all,” rejoined she, with a copious infusion of aciculæ. “There is now an affirmative and negative on our respective sides of the bed. I say that you are or were mumbling—which if the tenses be different, the sense is the same—you as positively affirm—and I dare say are ready to swear either on the Old or New Testament—that you are or were not. The case is clear,” argued Mrs. Doctor, “that I am either right or I’m wrong, and such may be received, by way of supposition, that you hold similar grounds. Now —”

“To settle the unhappy difference between us, Margaret,” added the apothecary, driven to despair, “I—I admit that I *was* mumbling.”

Mrs. Doctor laughed like a dramatic fiend, dressed in scarlet tights, surrounded by a liberal display of blue fire, and descending into that abyss where the stage carpenters attend to break his fall with the windlass, and share the friendly pot of Barclay's unadulterated.

"Ho, ho, ho, Mr. Grimes! And so you tried to get the better of me, did you, Sir, by volunteering an untruth? Upon my word, things have come to a pretty pass! I entertained the slight vision of a remote hope that, remembering the respectability of your connections, on the side of *my* family at least, you would hesitate before running the imminent risk—but just retribution—of blistering your tongue. But no," continued Mrs. Doctor, shaking her head, as he conjectured from the action of the bolster, "when the mind becomes hardened, all such beacons are extinguished."

“ In admitting an error—”

“ Pooh, pooh! No nonsense of that sort will do for me, Sir. Error indeed! Things now-a-days are never called by their proper names. It’s the fashion I believe; but one which I don’t think proper to have observed in my presence.”

“ If I may not be permitted to extenuate my fault —”

“ Certainly not,” again interrupted Mrs. Doctor. “ In such a clear, unshackled instance of open and confessed dereliction of the commonest of duties, there can be no extenuation.”

“ Margaret, will you listen to me?” pleaded the apothecary.

“ Under the circumstances,” replied his stiff partner, “ I much doubt whether I ought. But pro-ceed, Sir, pro-ceed.”

“ May I hope—”

“ Decidedly not; let that at once be

nipped in the bud. How can any one, guilty of such gross impropriety, be allowed to hope?"

"But, Margaret—"

"Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Grimes, pray don't. Whatever you may have got to say, say in as few words as possible. I'm not in a humour for long introductions."

"I was going to say—"

"Then say at once, and do not be always going, Sir," snapped Mrs. Doctor.

"If there is anything—"

"Of course there is."

"If there is anything—"

"You said that before."

"Anything—"

"Go on, get over anything."

"Which I can say or do," continued the apothecary, "to put an end to this unhappy difference, Margaret, believe me that I am not only most ready to conform to

your wishes, but more, much more than willing."

"Really, Mr. Grimes!" returned the stiff partner, "how very obliging!" and the sharp-set sneer was as distinct as the strongest sneeze of the finest specimen of the feline race.

"Whatever I may have done, or not done," resumed the apothecary, meek as any dove; "whatever said, or left unsaid, make me but familiar with my fault, and the cause for censure shall disappear."

"What a model of a husband!" said Mrs. Doctor. "I suppose, Sir, that you now set yourself up for a *model* of a husband, do you not?"

"No, Margaret," replied he, in a melancholy strain. "In respect to that I fall far short of the standard measure; but willing as I am to acknowledge and confess—"

"When found out! when the proof is so

clear that the nose on one's face is not more self-evident, the greatest criminals are certain to confer upon society the kindness to admit that which they know it is impossible, or useless, to deny. The depth of the cunning of incorrigible malefactors is beyond belief!" said Mrs. Doctor.

When roughly handled, even the mouse has been known to bite, the sparrow to peck, and the worm to wriggle.

The spirit of the British lion, at length, was roused. His professional reputation scoffed at; his love of books and abstruse studies, when he walked the hospitals, ridiculed; his proffered terms, at any sacrifice, for peace, rejected; his sleep systematically broken; his peace of mind undermined; his dignity as a man—a respectable ratepayer—bespattered with the malevolence of slander.

Matters could not be worse, and with a quick and firm resolve he determined to

make a bold attempt to improve their condition.

The apothecary slowly raised himself in bed, and assumed a sitting posture.

“Unless you wish me to lose all patience,” observed Mrs. Doctor, “you’ll instantly re-occupy the parallel with me, Sir, which you have thought proper to quit in opposition to my desire, and greatly to my inconvenience.”

“Mrs. Grimes,” said the apothecary; and the tone possessed the same chilling effect upon her as if a jug of freshly-pumped water had been suddenly poured down the centre of her back, “Mrs. Grimes,” repeated he, “I’ll see you d—d first.”

Had a small barrel of gunpowder exploded under the bed, or a galvanic battery been applied to the soles of Mrs. Doctor’s feet, she could scarcely have been expected to

have vaulted higher as the result of a most decided sensation.

“What do I hear?” gasped she, with staring eye-balls. “What do I hear?”

“That I’ll no longer submit to be snubbed,” replied the apothecary, “and unless you conduct yourself, Madam, with becoming propriety to me, I’ll embrace the opportunity, while you’re in bed, of kicking you out.”

“Robert Grimes, are you mad?”

“No, Madam, nor will I be driven mad by being robbed of my sleep, plundered of my professional reputation, and otherwise loaded with the manacles of matrimonial slavery. No, henceforth I’ll be free—free as air—master of my house—lord of my bed.”

Mrs. Doctor began to think it advisable to try an experiment in the hysterics, and accordingly began to laugh, cry, and kick

with vigour; but the apothecary was not to be deceived by a flam on his professional acquirements.

“Unless you cease these boisterous proceedings, Mrs. Grimes,” said he, with a sternness of demeanor which he himself was unconscious of possessing, until then, the capacity to adopt, “I shall try what a little basting will do.”

“What?” ejaculated Mrs. Doctor, making a full stop in the general round of hysterics.

“I’ll try,” returned the apothecary, in a cold and calculating manner, as he seized his pillow by a convenient corner, and shook the feathers to the further end, “I’ll try what a little basting will do.”

“Robert Grimes!” and the stiff partner fused into a liquid state of tears, “you’re a brute.”

“I may be, Margaret,” rejoined he, with a

slight tendency to relent, but steadying himself, he again toed the scratch manfully. "I may be all that you have said, nay more, but I caution you never to tell me so again. I sued for peace in vain, and since you *will* have war, war it shall be!" and the pillow formed a circle above the tassel of his night-cap.

The bivalve oyster, fresh opened by Pimm's pointed and dexterous blade, never felt more flat or helpless than Mrs. Doctor. She no longer laughed, and cried, and kicked. There was not a kick in her. A calm ensued.

"If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have waken'd death!
And let the laboring bark climb hills of seas,
Olympus high, and duck again as low
As Hell's from Heaven!"

"Robert!"

"Madam!"

"Nay, don't speak so harshly to me,"

said Mrs. Doctor, persuasively, "I was your own tiddy-widdy Margery at one time, you know."

"And might have been still my tiddy-widdy," replied the apothecary. "Hostilities were never begun by me. In every instance that I can recal to my memory, have I given way to the unmerited attacks upon my peace; until driven to the verge of desperation I made a stand, and that stand I will maintain."

"An unhappy difference shall not take place between us again," rejoined she. "Resume your position, Robert, by the side of the wife of your bosom."

The invitation, perhaps, was irresistible; for the apothecary glided down between the sheets, impressed with the gratifying assurance of having achieved no doubtful victory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GRUNDY'S Green presented an unusual spectacle, one to which no stranger could possibly have been indifferent. The villagers were 'dressed all in their best,' and from the furbished exterior everybody wore, it was obvious that some extraordinary event of rare importance, or interest, was on the extreme point of coming off.

Undulated by a southerly wind, and its lustrous colors shining brightly under a cloudless sky, a large red flag swept grace-

fully from the time-honored sign of the Harrow and Pitchfork, and, early as the hour was, a full band of music, consisting of a drum, a clarionet, and a fiddle, played with considerable spirit before the portal.

The selection of the airs appeared to have been made with a view of gratifying an exclusive taste, for they had reference to one point, and to one point only.

"If I had a beau for a soldier I'd go," gave place to "The white cockade," and the last bar was scarcely wound to a finish by a mighty thump on the big drum, when "There's none so smart as my soldier laddie," commenced with a solo on the fiddle, and blended itself with variations, into "As two little drummer boys were going along, said one to the other, Bill, tip us a song."

Cheery was the music, cheery the players—especially Drum, who, however he might

lack melody, made up for the imperfection in the condensation of his power—and all went merrily as the peal of bells which at this moment broke upon the ear.

The poet has written “that all the world is a stage, and each man in his time plays many parts.” He who has played a most insignificant one in this history of love and war, and accident of field, if not of flood, Ned the ostler, now—to apply a forensic description—entered an appearance, bearing in his hand a tray containing things of no watery kind for the solace of Drum, Clarionet, and Fiddle.

Drum looked the head and front of those proselytes of Apollo, and, therefore, Ned, with praiseworthy observance of the laws of etiquette, opened his address to the vellum-headed instrument.

“Missis told me to tell you, one and all,”

said he, "that she's amazingly obleeged for the music, which she thinks is the sweetest—they were her werry words—that she ever heerd, and she hopes this jug of egg-flip—which she made with her own blessed hands, as I can witness whereof no one can deny, or if so let him come for'ard—will mollify your in'ards."

Drum seemed fully alive to the responsibility of his office—either thrust upon him, or virtually his own by inalienable right—and, clearing his voice, thus began:

"Give our thanks — the thanks of the United and Friendly Harmonical Fraternity, as incorporated with the Madrigal and Mutual Benefit Society—to your missis, and say that we, the members of the same, drink to the health, long life, prosperity, and happiness, for the last time, of Mistress Twigg; but, with the Divine blessing, we

hope to live, and live to hope, that a few hours only will intervene before we repeat the dose under another name—the name of Crump; Mrs. Corporal Crump,” said Drum.

Both Fiddle and Clarionet signified an entire concurrence in this sentiment, and the egg-flip disappeared with a precipitate movement, to be imitated with success only by constant practice.

The serenade being ended, the members of the Friendly Harmonical Fraternity, as incorporated with the Madrigal and Mutual Benefit Society, formed in line, and, attended by a large procession of all the small children in no immediate occupation, marched through the village with a succession of gay tunes, causing the halt and the old to cut capers deftly, and babies to stare with goggle eyes, in their nurses' arms.

Let the cynical be as churlish as they may; let the sticklers for form and fashion sneer their utmost, they shall not turn the chronicler of the full and particular account of the corporal's wedding from the bent of his carefully-weighed judgment, that it was an affair far more worthy of record than ninety and nine out of a hundred of those choice histories headed with the stereotyped title "Marriage in High Life."

There was no crush of carriages, it is true; neither can it be asserted that the lovely and youthful bride's rich dress consisted of Brussels or Honiton lace. A bishop most unquestionably received no sweet-scented, rose-tinted, delicately-expressed hope, on satin paper, that his mitred dignity would officiate in lieu of a more humble, and less remunerated, representative of the apostolic fishermen. The *déjeuner à*

la fourchette received no artistic pencilling from Europe's cook—she has but one—the inimitable Soyer; neither did Gunter act as caterer. Champagne, hock, burgundy, moselle, there were none. But why particularize what there was not? Let us rather turn to a picture of greater interest.

It is not known how the frill was obtained, or by whose hands it was so intricately crimped; but on Corporal Crump presenting himself on view to the public, it stood confessed, on every side, that such a shirt front had not been seen for many a day. It certainly was a prodigious frill! The quantity of cambric cannot be stated with anything like certainty; but as it abutted from his breast it caused the speculative mind to wonder, whether it was possible that he could command a view of those highly polished pumps which were

decorated with bows of an extensive character. And then the lavender pantaloons remain among the mysteries of his toilet on this eventful occasion. For no tailor in that part of the county could claim them as having been turned from his easel, and the sky blue silk waistcoat formed a corresponding link in the complicated chain of obscurity.

Tittle-tattle, that germ of dire mischief, often "no bigger than a midge's wing" abhors a vacuum, and therefore, in the absence of a more colorable report, assigned the source, whence these attractive garments were traceable, to the well-preserved wardrobe of the late pitiable Twigg.

The postulate, however, resolved itself into an assumption of the most flimsy description, and not a particle of evidence was ever offered in support of this weak invention, probably, of the enemy.

The corporal had not habituated himself to the starched unyielding folds of a white cravat, although he well knew what a shining leather stock was, and therefore, as he craned his chin over the one which now encircled his throat, it far from assisted to soften down the general stiffness of his attire, directly attributable to the prodigious shirt-front.

Swallow-tailed was that glossy blue coat, ornamented with the brightest of bright buttons, and the Waterloo medal on the left breast gave a finish to the imposing effect which can hardly be conveyed in prose.

Supported by Jacob Giles on one side, who had bestowed infinite and even lavish pains in getting himself up in his best Sunday suit, and the old Peninsular on the other, Corporal Crump commenced that march which would terminate at the altar of the parish church of Grundy's Green, and

where both himself and his Charlotte were to put a seal upon that compact, irrevocably joining their hands, let the condition of their hearts be what it might.

Bill Stumpit, it may be as well to observe, had made but a slight change in his exterior, consisting of the addition of a large false collar acting precisely like a pair of blinkers, between which he looked like a horse in harness.

With head erect, and shoulders back, the old Peninsular flourished his bit of British oak, and the three-cornered felt hat jerked slightly on one side—attracted a full share of public admiration.

The village was lined with an admiring throng, and nothing could exceed the enthusiasm with which the corporal and his supporters were greeted as, led by the full band which played “See the conquering hero

comes," they pointed for the parish church, conveniently situated within a short quarter of a mile of the Harrow and Pitchfork. Cheers, congratulations, and good wishes were showered upon the bridegroom elect with a liberality amounting to profusion, and a few juvenile boys threw a succession of flying wheels in advance of him, greatly to the delight of the bystanders, who appeared to appreciate this exhibition of athletic art.

An important stage was now gained, for the full band again stood before the entrance of the domicile of Mistress Twigg. Drum announced their advent by a roll which, if it shook nothing else, vibrated through Charlotte's system, until her double chin wagged like a moving mould of calves-foot jelly. It was quite beyond the control of her presence of mind, and therefore she

abandoned the involuntary movement to its own eccentric course.

Now came the essence, the lozenge, so to speak, of the attraction which drew that motley crowd about, and around, the entrance of the Harrow and Pitchfork.

Mistress Twigg appeared.

“Holla, boys, holla!” cried Drum.

And then a cheer rose to make the welkin ring, and load the trembling air.

For a bride of a certain age, for one whose charms required no quickening, it is alleged, without fear of contradiction, that a more comely candidate for the favors of Hymen was never beheld within the confines of Grundy’s Green; no, not even by the oldest inhabitant.

Blushing like a full-blown rose, and her face illuminated with the happiest of smiles, Mistress Twigg stepped forth, and presented

the corporal with a hand as if she meant it.

This well-timed act met with considerable approbation, and, as the procession was again formed, the commonwealth seemed to deem it worthy of a demonstration of the popular voice.

Before, however, any further progress was made towards the parish church, Ned the ostler, who appeared red as tomato sauce from the combined influence of potent drams, exertion, and importance, went round with a pyramid of white favors, piled upon a tea-tray, and desired a general decoration of the breasts and hats of the British public.

This being settled to the satisfaction of all, but more particularly to Ned, Drum whirled his sticks wildly above his head by way of a preliminary, and bringing

them down with a crash, Clarionet and Fiddle took up the melody, and on the body swept, to the strangely selected air of "Oh ! dear, what can the matter be, nobody's coming to marry me."

There was no accounting, however, for the vagaries of Drum after egg-flip. That everybody said.

It is needless to say that lesser stars are invariably eclipsed by those of greater magnitude, and as Mistress Twigg might now be considered a planet of the first degree, general attention was directed exclusively to her.

Opinions will differ upon most subjects, and therefore, that they were not in perfect unity upon the knotty point of the bridal array, will not appear singular. A few of the hypercritical thought the bonnet of *la fiancée* too splendid for her time of life,

and that less riband would have proved infinitely more becoming. The dress was gorgeous in the extreme, there could be no denying *that*, and must have cost a pretty penny. But Mistress Twigg should have remembered that a peach-blossom satin was a trying color for one who had seen the sunny side of——

Well ! no matter what ; but at any rate it was better adapted for a younger bride ; *that* they would maintain all the world over, and more, if any should be discovered.

A pinch of snuff for such opinions !

Pleased with herself, proud of her military betrothed, at amity with mankind—even with the landlady of the Spit and Chicken—and prepared to go through the ordeal with becoming serenity, Mistress Twigg arrived at the lych gate of the church, and—

But the archives, upon the payment of a small fee to the worthy functionary now in office as parish clerk, will furnish an authenticated proof of what then ^{and} there took place, between Richard Crump and Charlotte Twigg.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE members of the Rollicking Association were asked to a man. The customers and neighbours, good, moderate, and indifferent, were also included, and it is believed that such was the attention paid in issuing the invitations to all in the possession of anything like a qualification, that upon the assembling of the guests in the club-room of the Harrow and Pitchfork, when the moon was up and the stars winked, not an

exception had been made either by design or accident.

To dance at Mrs. Corporal Crump's wedding would be a notch cut deeply in the history of the past, and not to be one of that festive throng must have savoured of something far from creditable to the excluded. All were asked, however, and all came, and even Margaret, the apothecary's stiff partner, threw aside the dregs of pride and jealousy which were left at the extreme bottom of her flat bosom, and, to the astonishment of many, swept into the club-room, arm in arm with Doctor Grimes, dressed in luminous blue satin, and, with a bespangled turban, surmounting the row of mahogany curls, created a sensation of no ordinary kind.

If a slight lurking condescension was perceptible in the very grand obeisance with

which the stiff partner received Mrs. Corporal Crump's welcome, giving in exchange a formal, distinct, compass-and-rule congratulation, still there she was—as nobody could deny—in new bright blue satin and a bespangled turban.

Doctor Grimes's bald head became very conspicuous as it performed an uninterrupted series of bows, and his figure being encased in a professional coat and "knees" to match, with black silk stockings, and a white waistcoat, he bore a powerful resemblance to a magpie in full plumage.

But a truce to comparisons. There they were to celebrate the auspicious event, and right heartily did each appear in the best of humours to render that support which the event demanded upon its own merits.

The club-room looked a perfect galaxy of light, and, decorated with flowers and

wreaths of evergreen, nothing could exceed the brilliancy of the entire effect, as the authoritative voice of Drum—that Drum was ever in the van — commanded the couples to take their places for a country dance.

There was no refusing Drum, and, to quicken their movements, he gave a roll which brought them into form much sooner than could be expected.

The honor of opening the ball with the bride was confided to the apothecary, who, as the full band struck up an inspiring strain, led her off with a spirit and vigour which required the whole of Mrs. Corporal Crump's physical energy to maintain.

Away went the peach blossom, down the middle and up again, and opinions were divided between the ardour and grace which attended the movement. Some awarded the

palm to the former; but there were those who considered the latter as entitled to the head and front of approbation.'

Since legs formed the pronged figure of man—supposed to be at a very primitive stage of the world's history—never did those truly useful members of the human body perform a nimbler motion, than those of which the apothecary stood the acknowledged proprietor. If ever legs were inspired they were. Up and down, in and out, round and round; it was impossible for the mind to dwell upon any one of the mechanical actions with that admiration which each deserved—standing on its own claim—for the brain became dizzy with the maze, and intricate labyrinth of the performance.

A check—to use a sporting phrase—now took place with the leading couple, and, as

they threw up, both evinced the most decided symptoms of great exertion. Irrespective of a decided loss of breath, Mrs. Corporal exhibited a considerable degree of moisture upon her surface, and the apothecary found it indispensable to apply a little friction to his dexter calf from a decided tendency to cramp.

It was now the bridegroom's turn to attempt a corresponding Terpsichorean display, and seizing the apothecary's stiff partner with both hands, he would have led her, perhaps, as merry a jig, had she not indicated a decided preference for the grace of attitude, rather than the agility of step.

Mrs. Doctor sailed down the middle and up again, and, after setting with much dignity to the old Peninsular and his partner, cast her eyes down the line of faces,

and appeared gratified with the impression created. It was a decided stately performance; and, as such, possessed a commendatory claim.

Corporal Crump in the support of his reputation for accomplishing everything well that he undertook, fulfilled his part as became a principal; although as a specimen of what he could do, from being clogged with the grace and dignity of Mrs. Doctor, it might be regarded as many degrees below the standard of his capacity.

Bill Stumpit's was, of course, an exhibition in which more stiffness than elegance might be witnessed; but still he flourished his bit of British oak with the greatest animation, and kept the most exact time and measure to the tune.

There were a few casualties to a collected group of senseless toes which awkwardly

stood in his path ; but these produced little interruption, and the old Peninsular concluded his laudable attempt to tread the mazy throng with well-earned and unanimous praise.

Set succeeded set, tune followed tune, and so the hours skipped nimbly by.

The bare thought would be malignant to suspect that those who came to dance at the corporal's wedding should be permitted to do so with feverish tongues, parched palates, and dried-up lips. No, perish the idea, if there be one to perish !

Fragrant as the perfume which curled from Hebe's ambrosial nectar, clouds ascended of the sweetest incense from many a yawning bowl, and magical were the attributes of these deep vessels, for it appeared impossible to drain them. At least, there they stood the test of the live-long night,

and at cock-crow were ready to supply a Dutchman's draught.

To the good cheer provided, ample—ay, thorough justice was done by that right merry company. There was no stint in the supply, no coyness in the demand, and the revel continued, as if the zenith being reached, there could be no decline or fall.

Joke and jest, song and story, hoodman's blind, and hunt the slipper, varied the cycle of pleasure, and it was not until Drum gave unequivocal symptoms of a pugnacious disposition towards Clarionet that there appeared anything like a decided approach of breaking up the assembly.

As the mere drop of water, however, tells the miner that he must drive his spade no deeper, so this hostile demonstration on the part of Drum warned the guests that

the time had arrived for their departure.

There were two, however, who resisted the general decision, and vehemently declared that not only must they decline going home till morning, and after daylight did appear, but having vowed eternal friendship, nothing could be allowed to separate them until the crack of doom.

“Permit me to say, comrade,” observed Corporal Crump, addressing the knight of the muscles, who stood balancing himself through the medium of a firm hold of Bill Stumpit’s iron hook, “permit me to say, comrade,” repeated he, “that there is nothing eternal in this world but folly.”

“The devil there isn’t,” Mr. Burly replied as if his mouth was full of hard peas.

“You’ll excuge me, Corp’l Kwump, but feel o’ that, Sir,” continued he, offering an arm. “If that isl’t eternal, Sir, what can be said of marble?”

“He had ye there, Dicky,” added the old Peninsular, in a spluttering kind of whistle, and maintaining his perpendicular under great apparent difficulties. “It hasn’t been my lot,” continued he, “to hear such a reply for many a day.”

“Well, well!” returned the Corporal, laughing, “may the difference of opinion never upset the cup of good will. Let me assist you, Bill.”

“No, bridegroom,” replied the old Peninsular with an independent wave of the hook. “I want no aux-aux-aux-ill-ll-ary aid from anybody, Sir, as you shall see,” and giving a heavy lurch forwards, the bit of British oak failed to maintain the balance of weight,

and down he went on the flat of his back in one of the most helpless of postures.

"If you do that again, veteran," said Burly James, stooping over the fallen hero, "I shall begin to think you're getting drunk."

"Pick me up," responded the old Peninsular. "Upon second thoughts, Richard Crump, I'll avail myself of your polite assistance."

The desired help being readily given, Bill Stumpit regained his perpendicular, and, eschewing the eternal friendship which he had just sworn with the knight of the muscles, consented to be placed carefully in a wheelbarrow, and conveyed to his quarters by Ned the ostler. Jacob Giles pretended to steady the load; but it was generally believed that in steadying the load he did so to steady himself.

The dance was deserted; the guests had departed; the full band had become as mute as dumb-bells.

The corporal's wedding was numbered among the things of the past.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE now remains little more to recount of what befel the actors in the scenes in the historical drama of the Belle of the Village.

Jacob Giles experienced the greatest consolation in the society of the old Peninsular, and it is supposed that the battles in which that hero had been engaged were

fought over and over again. For during the long winter's evenings they were known to sit for hours together in the little back settlement, and with his chin resting upon his hands, his hands through the agency of his elbows, and his elbows upon the table, Jacob drew in, with his breath, those thrilling details of

“ Most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field ;
Of hair-breadth 'scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,”

and appeared never weary with their recapitulation.

Thus winter succeeded winter, and the old tales were told o'er and o'er again.

As was anticipated, Bridget, upon the corporal's departure, made a determined effort to grasp the reins of government in the household of the general shop; but, sup-

ported by the old Peninsular, Jacob, with many misgivings concerning the result, put down the aspiring ambition of his house-keeper, and ruled with the combined lenity and firmness which become a master.

The apothecary and Mrs. Doctor Grimes, having arrived at a desirable understanding, continued to pass both their days and nights in that conjugal state of harmony, which is recommended as highly beneficial both for the condition of the mind and stomach.

There is no reason to conjecture that Margaret was ever rash enough to again attempt a lecture of the curtain kind, or, indeed, any other, and with undiminished popularity and confidence, the apothecary supported that professional reputation, of which he was so chary, untarnished and unimpaired,

to the last hour of his manipulating a pill or spreading a cataplasm.

It became the general subject of remark that Corporal Crump, from living, probably, so much at his ease, grew corpulent, and not a trace of the straight military figure of former days was visible in the puffy boniface of the Harrow and Pitchfork.

Attractive as that famous hostelrie indubitably was, under the immediate direction of Mistress Twigg, it became doubly so when the charming and buxom widow, from legal necessity, had the licence changed to Crump. Travellers have been known to make a wide circuit out of their direct road to quaff a cup of the best with its military landlord, and so fascinated were some of the most sensitive with his eloquence and sentiments, that it is a matter of unquestionable

authenticity they remained many more days than they intended hours.

The bar-parlour had to be enlarged in consequence of the great increase of business in that particular branch of the trade, and such was the rapidly increasing wealth of the corporal and his wife that the latter, in the joy of her heart, proposed that they should keep a chaise, and astonish the Browns!

To the credit of Corporal Crump be it said, there was nothing that Charlotte did, would, or could propose, but to which he felt a ready inclination to accede. To keep a chaise, however, would, as he knew, *greatly* astonish the Browns, and it required some reflection upon the policy of the measure.

With the keen eye of a general, Corporal Crump swept the horizon of the future, and

pondered upon the likely effect of the measure; but as there appeared no substantial grounds for withholding this cordial to his Charlotte's pride, he assented to the proposal, and braved the envious eyes and censorious observations of the whole of the Browns, Smiths, and Robinsons in the neighbourhood.

Let whatever might be said on those occasions, when a yellow and green chaise—the colors might not harmonize—stood at the door of the Harrow and Pitchfork, and between the shafts of which chaise a flea-bitten grey might be seen, held by Ned the ostler, pawing the ground, impatient of delay—it was a noble sight.

The Johnsons and the Thompsons, the Browns, Smiths, and Robinsons, laughed like spectres—a hollow, sepulchral mockery of mirth—and they wondered when a carriage

and pair, with powdered footmen, in gorgeous liveries and silk stockings, would take its place.

They indulged—did these respective and respectable families—in speculations upon the probable and particular source whence the “turn out” was procured;—whether from the profits arising from beer, brandy, gin, hollands, or rum.

They—the Robinsons and the Thompsons, the Smiths, Browns, and Johnsons—sincerely prayed that no accident would befall so spirited an investment; as for it to be smashed, hashed, or scratched, must prove quite a national calamity—quite.

Harnessed, however, in the consciousness of their own rectitude of conduct and design, the Corporal and his Charlotte were proof against these pigmy shafts, and each glanced from the butt, or fell short of the mark.

Happy, because contented, and taking pleasure in pleasing each other, Corporal Crump and his wife trotted together down the hill of life, with a glorious sunset over head, and as they approached the bottom, they might have turned and examined every step without the regret of its being too late to retrace.

Jonathan and the Guard continued to make the most punctual visits to the Harrow and Pitchfork, and an allusion was occasionally made by the latter to the man that drank to the King with no heel-taps.

It was observed by several of Jonathan's friends, that his hilarity and liveliness were not in the ascendant for some weeks after the corporal's wedding, but gradually the depression wore away, and his "Hold hard! let go their heads, Ned," was as

cheerful as in the days that he himself entertained the hope of making the buxom widow his own, with her ready money, fixtures, good-will, and stock in trade.

James Burly, otherwise Burly James, remained in a position which seemed to afford all the gratification in life he either claimed or desired. As coachman to the "poor cripple," as he now called his master, he found, as he said, the service to be comparative freedom, and with liberal wages for doing next to nothing, the knight of the muscles felt not the slightest inclination to run the risk of bettering himself or his heirs.

Few indeed were the evenings that he absented himself from the bar-parlour, and there he might be seen, after the slight business of the day was done, in the full

enjoyment of that social intercourse with the kindred spirits therein assembled.

Quitting his country for his country's good, Doctor Starkie wandered to the sunny clime of Italy, where, possibly, full of remorse for unbridled passions, craft, and cruel treachery, he had his head smoothly shaved, and became a holy friar of orders grey.

The religious brother was soon known, far and wide, as the strictest disciplinarian that the Church possessed, and the penance he enjoined, and, it was said, performed as an ensample, caused him to be looked upon in the light of little short of a saint. Many were the pilgrims, and fair penitents, who came to his lonely cell for shrift and absolution; he was regarded by crowds of devotees, as the stepping-stone to Paradise.

A strange story, however, at length got mooted abroad, much to the scandal of this anointed son of the Church, and, whether true or not, dire was the vengeance which it brought upon his head.

None witnessed the struggle, save those engaged in it; but that it was one both fierce and long, the blood-sprinkled walls, and pavement slimed with gore, presented conclusive proofs.

With his limbs rigid and stiffened in the last violent throes of death, and his eyeballs staring as if ready to start from their sockets, the body of the monk was found on the floor of his cell, with a stiletto driven to the handle in his heart. In the grasp of one of his own convulsively clutched hands a small dagger was discovered, and the broken point, tipped with blood, showed that it had not been wide of the intended mark.

The cause of the sanguinary deed was never spoken of, but when hints were given respecting it, men shrugged their shoulders, and separated in silence from each other.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE sunny morning when the sky was clear, serene, and beautiful, Miss Christina Baxter might have been perceived in the highest of spirits—in spirits of the most buoyant description.

The myrtle was in full bloom, and so was Miss Baxter, although time, that sneaping destroyer of all that is lovely to look upon, had left the old shrub—need it be said that this description is applicable to the myrtle, and *not* to Miss Baxter?— with a declining

paucity of green leaves to show that it was still endowed with the powers of vitality.

As if to spare no one and nothing, however;—as if the fell destroyer revelled in shaking the full-bloom flower;—in crumbling “the noblest works that man can raise; — in wrinkling the face of beauty, and changing the hopeful beaming smile of youth into the sour scowl of impotent, babbling age, Time had stamped his crow’s foot even upon the visage of Miss Christina Baxter.

The hoar frost of Age, assisted by his help-mate Care, seemed to have taken pleasure in whitening the few remaining locks which were visible beneath the border of that little puritanical cap; but he could not—even with all that his help-mate had done—dim the lustre of a heart which shone in her face like a gem of priceless worth—

a heart beating with ten times more love for her neighbour than herself.

Miss Baxter looked older, it is true; there was no denying that self-supporting truism; but brisker she never was, happier she never appeared, as standing before a looking-glass of narrow dimensions, upon this sunny morning when the sky was clear, serene, and beautiful, she examined her figure both before and behind, and even raised herself on a footstool to take in the extreme depth, as it stood arrayed in the unusual splendour of a silver grey silk dress.

The pains which Miss Christina bestowed upon her toilet can be compared only to miniature painting. Not a frill nor a tucker but what was arranged and re-arranged in a way most becoming to the particular and general effect, and as she pronounced the study to be complete in the words that "she

thought that would do," Miss Baxter presented an appearance of extraordinary lustre.

"Only to think," soliloquized she, "that I should survive to be a bridesmaid!" and then Miss Christina's eyes became rivetted on the reflection of herself in the glass, as if to make assurance doubly sure, that there was no mistake in the matter.

"I'm not indulging in a vision," said Miss Baxter, proceeding to adjust the neatest of white drawn silk bonnets. "No; this is not a dream—a deception of the senses—not one of those fairy castles raised in the air, upon an imaginary foundation of rose-leaves. Oh, no! this is real happiness; happiness that I would rather die than wake from."

Miss Christina at this moment seemed overcome with her reflections, and sitting

down in a chair, conveniently placed, appeared rather disposed to have "a good cry."

Compromising the tendency with two large drops which rolled down her cheeks, the little simple-minded old governess pronounced that she was remarkably stupid to take on so, and wondered how she should be so weak as to weep at the happiest moment of her life. It really looked as if some persons—of whom she undoubtedly was one—resolved to turn the tap of their tears upon every opportunity, whether the cause justified the waste or not, and henceforth it should be a rule with her, to which there should be no exception, to abstain from making such a puerile display for the future.

Miss Christina expunged all traces of her tears, and tying the ribbons of the

white drawn silk bonnet, completed her toilet.

Among the innate virtues of James Burly in his character of coachman, was a strict and punctilious regard to keeping the exact time at which he was ordered to perform his respective duties, and to the minute of his expected arrival, he drove to Miss Baxter's garden gate a pair of plethoric horses, panting from excess of flesh rather than want of breath.

The sight of the carriage evidently created a sensible flutter through Miss Christina's system; but she checked the nervousness with a firm restraint, and opened the door of her domicile.

"Good morning," Mr. Burly," said Miss Baxter, in the most cheerful of accents. Let me express the hope of seeing you quite well to-day."

“The same to you ’m,” responded the Knight of the Muscles, “and many of them.”

“May I ask how you left our dear young friends?” returned Miss Christina with an inexpressible shake of the head as she drew on a tightly-fitting glove.

Burly James descended from the box-seat with great deliberation and, throwing the reins carelessly over the obese animals back—for he knew he could trust them to remain as still as the stones on which they stood—approached Miss Baxter, and taking off his hat—for he was always respectful to his superiors—whispered close to her ear; not that there existed any necessity for so doing :

“Himpatient ’m I should say, and if I’m any judge ’m, it’s a toss up of a button which ’o the two—supposing it were a race—would get to the church first, Miss Clara or Mr. Leonard;

but I think " continued he, " if a quarter's wages depended on it I'd back —"

" Hush, hush, good Mr. Burly!" interrupted Miss Baxter, deprecatingly. " Fie, fie! I shall really blush if you say any more."

" Then as it is not my natur 'm to make a lady blush," replied he, re-covering his head, " we'd better make a start of it," and throwing open the carriage door, Miss Christina entered the vehicle without any pomp or circumstance of state, and was driven away.

The past.

In that one word what joys and hopes, what sadness, smiles, and tears lie buried !

What is the present but the future's past? As we are, so have others been. Life is but the mutation of those scenes wherein the

actors play motley parts, and when played out, others succeed them. Few but think their own the heaviest to bear withal, and all assign the causes of their disappointments, and failures, to any source but those errors of which they themselves were the originators.

To justify himself how prompt is man;—how loth to confess and acknowledge his transgressions !

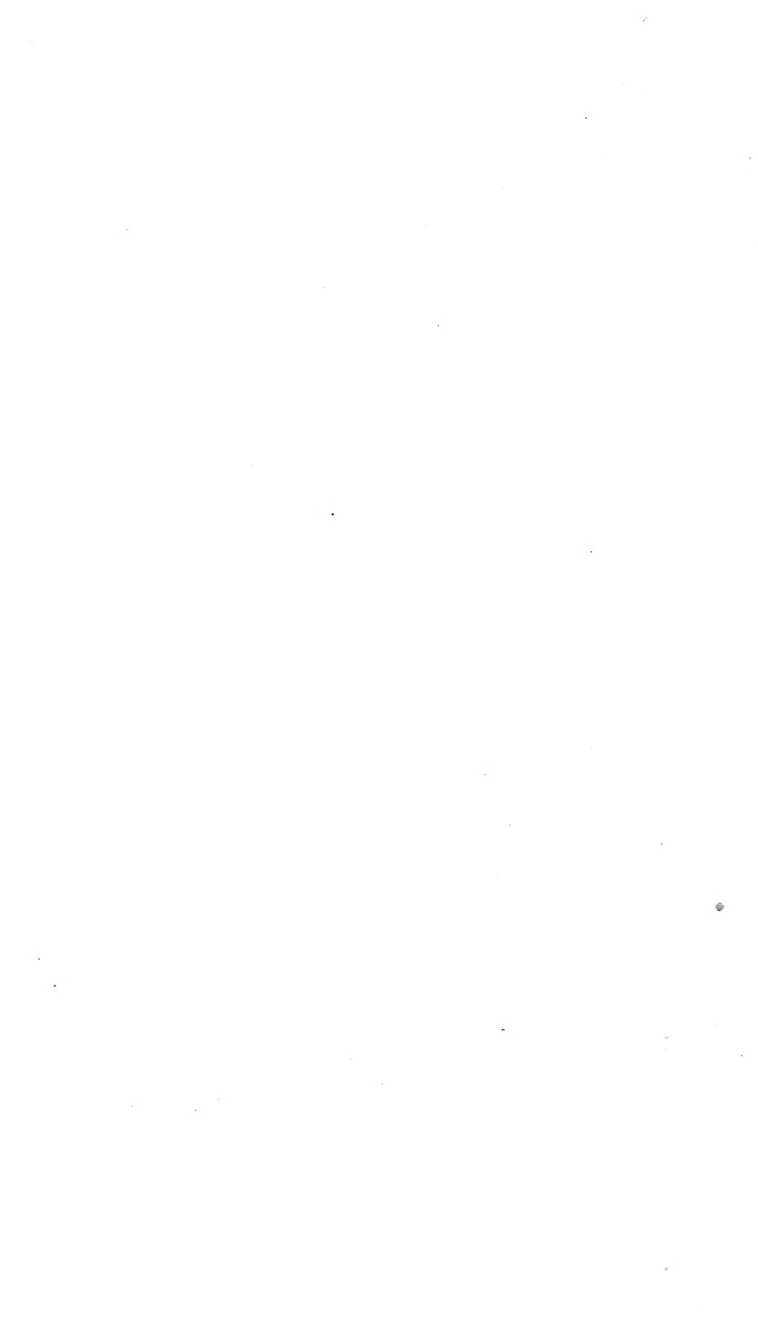
As it has been, so it is, and alas ! will be.

Life is the same dull, unprofitable story, because none will heed the holy lessons it would teach. It is, indeed,

“ a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying—nothing.”

FINIS.



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